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Talking about tough times: Parents' experiences and challenges discussing economic hardship and inequality with their elementary school-aged children

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Katherine Mildred Griffin

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Talking about tough times: Parents' experiences and challenges discussing economic hardship and inequality with their elementary school-aged children

by

Katherine Mildred Griffin

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Rashmita S. Mistry, Chair

In the wake of one of the largest income gaps in our country's history (Stiglitz, 2012) and a school system that is increasingly segregated along economic and racial lines (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011), children in the United States today are growing up in a remarkably inequitable economic landscape. While prior research suggests that elementary school aged children have a burgeoning understanding of wealth and poverty (Mistry, et al., 2016; Sigelman, 2012), little is known about what informs their beliefs. Given the importance of proximal contexts, such as the family (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), this project examined parents and young children's discussions of issues related to economic hardship and inequality, and how these discussions varied by child age and family background characteristics. To do so, 26 parents and their kindergarten, 2nd, and 4th grade children participated in a shared viewing and discussion of developmentally appropriate video clips on economic hardship (e.g. job loss and hunger), and parents were interviewed about their discussions at home with their child about family finances, economic inequality, and helping individuals and families in need. Parent-child video discussions were primarily characterized by empathy-related socialization such as perspective taking and labeling emotions. In interviews, when

asked how they discussed helping those in need, parents uniformly spoke about charitable giving, such as donation drives, but rarely discussed structural forms of support, such as government benefits. Finally, when asked about how they talked with their children about the causes of economic inequality, parents reported giving a variety of attribution types, however, in parent-child discussions parents often gave unclear attributions (e.g. job loss) for the causes of economic hardship. In both parent-child video discussions and parent interviews, I found that conversations varied by child grade, though variation was also evident by parents' political ideology (i.e. liberal versus moderate/ conservative parents). By documenting parents' conversations about economic hardship and inequality, this study's findings shed light on how young children develop beliefs about poverty, economic inequality, and social class, and provides insight into how researchers and educators might work to support families in having these important discussions.

This dissertation has been approved by:

Sandra H. Graham

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2019

For Sean, the soul of my soul

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Next, I must thank the mothers, fathers, and children who shared their stories with me. I hope that this work serves not only to represent the practices and values you shared but also to inform how researchers, educators, and other parents speak to their children. I am also indebted to the 30 community organizations who generously helped me recruit participants.

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Quint, J., **Griffin, K.M.,** Kaufman, J., Landers, P. & Utterback, A. (2018). *Experiences of Parents and Children Living in Poverty: A Review of the Qualitative Literature. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation*, US Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, D.C.

Hazelbaker, T., **Griffin, K. M**., Nenadal, L., & Mistry, R. S. (2018). Early elementary school children's conceptions of neighborhood social stratification and fairness. Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 4, 153- 164.

Mistry, R.S., Nenadal, L., Hazelbaker, T., & **Griffin, K.M**., & White, E. S. (2017). Promoting elementary school-age children's understanding of wealth, poverty, and civic engagement. *PS: Political Science and* Politics, Teacher Symposium: The Politics and Pedagogy of Economic Inequality. 50, 1068-1073.

Mistry, R. S., Nenadal, L., **Griffin, K.M**., Zimmerman, F.J., Cochran, H.A., Thomas, C.A., & Wilson, C. (2016). Children's reasoning about poverty, economic mobility, and helping behavior: Results of a curriculum intervention in the early school years. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72, 756-784.

Mistry, R.S., White, E., Chow, K., **Griffin, K.M**., & Nenadal, L. (2016). Children's Reasoning About Economic Inequality: The Value Added of a Mixed-Methods Research Approach. In Horn, S., Ruck, M., & Liben, L. (Eds). *Advances in Child Development and Behavior: Theoretical and Empirical/Methodological Issues Associated with Equity and Justice Part A*. Cambridge, MA: Elsevier.

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2016 Graduate Student Reviewer for The Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD) 2017 Biannual Meeting

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Invited Talks

2018 **Griffin, K.M**. (21 February 2018). *Talking with Children about Wealth, Poverty, and Civic Engagement*. Presented at The Rotary Club, Plymouth, NH.

2016 Mistry, R.S., **Griffin, K.M**., & Nenadal, L. (24 May 2016). *Children's social identities and intergroup relations: Let's talk about social class*. Presented at Sesame Workshop, New York, New York.

2016 Mistry, R.S., Nenadal, L., & **Griffin, K.M.** (28 March 2016). *Learning About Poverty (and Wealth) in Early Elementary School Classrooms*. Presented at the UCLA Laboratory School, Los Angeles, California.

2016 Mistry, R.S., **Griffin, K.M**., & Bailey, A.L. (24 February 2016). *LTL R&D Project Findings.* Presented at the UCLA Laboratory School, Los Angeles, California.

Chapter 1:

Introduction & Literature Review

Today, the United States is a country deeply divided across many lines: political, racial, nationality, socioeconomic, religious, sexual orientation, immigration status, and more. The daily news cycle is full of stories that show the very real, very dire impacts of stereotypes and prejudice in our society. In light of these events, parents and other adults have tried to make sense of how to discuss these difficult topics with children (Kulkarni, 2016; Michael, 2016). As developmental researchers, we know the importance of these conversations, as beliefs and attitudes about social groups have their roots in childhood, and as responsible citizens it is our job to study how stereotypes form, in part to understand how to combat them. Research suggests that social class bias has real consequences -- from how adults vote (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003) to how confident we are in our own academic abilities (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Croizet & Millet, 2011) -- beliefs about social class matter. We therefore must seriously consider how children come to understand these concepts. A growing body of literature demonstrates the salience of social class in childhood beginning as early as preschool (Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1981; Ramsey, 1991; Sigelman, 2012) and some research has begun to examine social class socialization in contexts such as at school, in the home, and with peers (Flanagan et al., 2014; Mistry, Brown, Chow, & Collins, 2012; Mistry, et.al., 2016). While there, undoubtedly, are a vast array of influences on children's beliefs about social class, this study examines parents' socialization practices of such concepts with their young children.

Social class is "the higher order construct representing an individual or group's relative position in an economic-social-cultural hierarchy…denoting power, prestige, and control over resources," (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López, & Reimers, 2012, p. 3) and is often discussed in the United States using the group labels: poor, working class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, and rich (Ostrove & Long, 2007) and in child development research most typically in

terms of wealth and poverty (i.e. rich and poor) (Mistry et al., 2016; Sigelman, 2012). The importance of this topic is perhaps best understood when one considers the larger literature on adults' beliefs and attitudes about wealth and poverty as well as the impact of such opinions on society. While many Americans acknowledge the growing economic gap in the country (Drake, 2013) and often favor of a more equitable distribution of resources (Norton & Ariely, 2011), a majority (69%) of Americans surveyed believe that individuals living in poverty are too dependent on government aid (Pew Research Center, 2007), with many believing that a lack of motivation is a major reason for poverty (Lauder & Lauter, 2016; Litcher & Crowley, 2002). Additionally, while Americans believe that the rich do not pay high enough taxes and are more likely to be greedy, they also believe the rich are more likely to be intelligent and work harder than the average American (Parker, 2012). We do not know however, how parents do or do not transmit these beliefs to their children.

These class-based stereotypes are even more important when one considers their real-world implications. For example, research suggests that when individuals from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds are reminded of their class background, they do worse on academic measures, such as a math test (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Croizet & Millet, 2011). Beliefs about social class also relate to adult voting patterns (Bullock et al., 2003). For example, researchers have found that causal attributions for wealth and poverty are predictive of one's support of policies that aid individuals living in poverty, such that individuals who attribute social standing to individualistic causes (e.g. effort or ability) do not support policies which benefit the most vulnerable members of society (Bullock et al., 2003).

In the wake of the Great Recession and facing the largest societal economic gap since the Great Depression (Stiglitz, 2012), researchers and policy makers have a vested interest in

understanding class-related attitudes and beliefs, and as developmental researchers we have much to offer to this important discussion. Research on the children's beliefs and attitudes about wealth and poverty clearly demonstrate that young children have an awareness of social class (Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1981; Mistry et al., 2016; Ramsey, 1991). Less is known about the antecedents of children's beliefs and attitudes, with limited research in recent years emphasizing sources of influence, including parents (Flanagan et al., 2014; Hunter, Friend, Williams-Wheeler, & Fletcher, 2012), peers (Flanagan et al., 2014), and the school context (Mistry, et.al., 2012; Mistry et al., 2016). No study to date has looked at how parents socialize their children about social class during the early elementary school years- a time of rapid develop in children's beliefs and attitudes about social class (Leahy, 1981; 1983; Sigelman, 2012). Therefore, the goal of the current study is to understand parental socialization of issues related to poverty, economic hardship, and economic inequality with early elementary school aged children.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The current study is guided by Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). From a bioecological perspective, children's interactions with the world around them drive their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). While the theory outlines five levels of interactions, from proximal to distal, the current study focuses interactions within the most proximal level: the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The microsystem includes activities, roles, and relationships within a child's immediate context such as with friends, school, and parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005). Bronfenbrenner suggests that proximal processes -- that is the interactions between individuals in the microsystem (such as parents) with the child herself as an active participant -- are key to understanding development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

A second theoretical perspective motivating this study, Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT; Bigler & Liben, 2006), highlights the importance of conversations about wealth and poverty in terms of their potential impact on stereotypic reasoning. DIT suggests that as children develop, they become increasingly aware of social groups that are salient within their environment (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity). Bigler and Liben (2006) posit that if such differences are not explained explicitly and adequately, children develop their own ideas about why the groups exist, often based on group stereotypes which can develop into prejudice (Bigler & Liben, 2006). Therefore, given the known salience of social class to young children (Leahy, 1981; Mistry et al., 2016; Sigelman, 2012), DIT encourages adults to consider the explanations that children do or do not receive for the societal differences they observe.

Children's Beliefs and Attitudes about Social Class

The roots of our beliefs about wealth and poverty begin early in childhood. Children as young as 3 to 5 years of age show a basic knowledge of the categories rich and poor through their ability to sort objects into these groups (Ramsey, 1991). From this early familiarity, children develop the ability to reason about social class, including notions about the personal attributes of individuals from different social class backgrounds as well as causal attributions for wealth and poverty (Chafel, 1997; Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Lavatelli, 1949; Leahy, 1981; Mistry et al., 2012, Mistry et al., 2016, Sigelman, 2012, 2013). In the current section, I will outline what is known about this development as well as the gaps in our knowledge.

Beliefs about Individuals from Different Social Class Backgrounds. Research suggests that children's beliefs about individuals from different social class backgrounds develop systematically. Young children (i.e., ages 3 to 8) tend to focus on possessions and concrete descriptors when asked to describe individuals from different social class backgrounds (Berti &

Bombi, 1988; Enesco & Navarro, 2003; Enesco et.al., 1995; Lavatelli, 1949; Leahy, 1981; Mistry, 2000; Navarro & Peñaranda, 1998). For example, Leahy (1981) interviewed 720 children between the ages of 5 and 18 from across the US and found that younger children – ages 5 to 7- were much more likely to speak about possessions when asked to describe and compare rich and poor people as compared with older children and adolescents in the study (ages 11-17). Similarly, in their research of Spanish children between the ages of 6 and 16, Enesco and colleagues (1995) found that 4- to 6-year-old children focused almost exclusively on external markers of wealth (e.g. clothing, physical appearance) and not on internal attributes.

This is not to say, however, that young children show no evidence of bias towards individuals from different social class backgrounds. A number of studies have found that, as early as preschool, children evaluate wealthy individuals more positively than individuals from low-income backgrounds (Horwitz, Shutts, & Olson, 2014; Mookherjee & Hogan, 1981; Newheiser & Olson, 2012; Sigelman, 2012). Horwitz and colleagues (2014) found that four- and five-year-old children in experimental laboratory conditions were more likely to show a preference for a wealthy novel group over non-wealth groups. Additionally, Sigelman (2012) found that children in the first grade (6-7 years old) rated a fictional rich adult as more competent than a fictional poor adult. These findings suggest that while young children may focus on concrete markers of social class, they can still express beliefs that show evidence of negative stereotypes about individuals from lower-status social class backgrounds and positive stereotypes about individuals from wealthier backgrounds at an early age, as DIT would suggest.

As children grow older, their conceptions of individuals from different social class backgrounds shift from a focus on external to internal attributes (Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1981). Leahy (1981) observed that older children (ages 11-17) focused on the internal traits and the

thoughts of individuals from poor and wealthy social class backgrounds significantly more so than did younger children (ages 5- 7). Additionally, other studies indicate that children and adolescents' rate individuals from low-status social class backgrounds as less intelligent, less popular, less attractive, and overall more negatively than individuals from higher-income backgrounds (Sigelman, 2012; Skafte, 1989). Such findings map onto the adult literature demonstrating that American adults hold stereotypes about the poor and rich based on internal attributes such as intelligence and effort (Lauder & Lauter, 2016; Parker, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2007).

Beyond developmental differences, the literature suggests that children's ideas about individuals from different social class backgrounds may vary by the child's own race or ethnicity, nationality, social class background, and subjective social status (Bonn & Webley, 2000; Camfield, 2010; Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Mistry, Brown, White, Chow, & Gillen-O'Neel, 2015). For example, work by Chafel & Neitzel (2005) suggests that children from lower-SES backgrounds differ in the number of references to material possessions made in their descriptions of individuals living in poverty as a function of their racial background (white or African American). The authors found that African American and Bi-racial children were twice as likely to refer to material possessions as were white children from low-income backgrounds. Mistry, Brown, and colleagues (2015) explored how children's subjective social status (SSS) -- their perceived standing on the social ladder -- related to their beliefs about others based on social class group membership. They found that children with lower-SSS ratings had more negative beliefs about individuals living in poverty than did children with middle-SSS ratings.

Causes of Wealth and Poverty. Children's causal attributions for wealth and poverty have traditionally been coded into one of three categories: individualistic (e.g. the result of an individual, such as money management, ability, effort), societal/structural (e.g. the result of the structure of

society, such as educational and job opportunities), or fatalistic (e.g. luck) (Mistry et al., 2012; Mistry et al., 2016; Sigelman, 2012). The extant research points to a developmental trajectory for children's causal attributions (Bonn & Webley, 2000; Camfield, 2010; Crosby, 2001; Enesco et al., 1995; Harrah & Friedman, 1990; Leahy, 1983; Leiser, Sevón, & Lévy, 1990; Sigelman, 2012, 2013). Leahy (1983), for example, observed that the youngest children in his sample (5-7 years old) often could not provide a reason for why individuals were rich or poor. Older children (ages 11-17), however, more readily provided explanations for wealth and poverty (Leahy, 1983). Specifically, between the ages of eleven to twelve years old children produced attributions for wealth and poverty, which were generally individualistic causes (e.g. ability and effort) (Leahy, 1983). More recent studies also suggest that while young children (3-6 years old) have trouble expressing a cause for social class differences (Ramsey, 1991), older children (7-11 years old) can make attributions for wealth and poverty (Bonn & Webley, 2000; Camfield, 2010; Enesco et al., 1995; Harrah & Friedman, 1990; Leiser et al., 1990; Sigelman, 2012, 2013).

Children's causal attributions also vary somewhat by gender, social class background, race and ethnicity, and nationality (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Enesco & Navarro, 2003; Flanagan et al., 2014; Leahy, 1983). For instance, Chafel & Neitzel (2005) found that 8-year-old boys in their US sample gave more definitional explanations for poverty (e.g. "They're poor because they have no money") than did girls; and that African American and Bi-racial children from higher-SES backgrounds were more likely to mention the lack of a job or a good job as a cause of poverty as compared to African American and biracial children of lower-SES backgrounds. Similarly, Enesco and colleagues (1995) found in their sample of Spanish children (ages 6-16) from upper-middle class and lower class neighborhoods – as defined by neighborhood mean income and occupation demographics – that understandings about the causes for wealth and poverty varied significantly by age and by the social class background of participants. They also reported that children from upper-

middle class backgrounds expressed more individualistic causes for wealth and poverty than children did from lower social class backgrounds (Enesco et al., 1995). Importantly, in all of these studies, the authors could not be sure why they saw such group differences suggesting that further research into the antecedents of these beliefs is necessary.

Moving Beyond Social Address Variables. Taken together, the extant research suggests that age as well as the racial, ethnic, nationality, gender, and family SES background contribute to children's beliefs and attitudes about wealth and poverty (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Enesco & Navarro, 2003; Flanagan et al., 2014; Leahy, 1983). This is consistent with the adult literature (see Robinson, 2009), which also documents variation by religious beliefs (Hunt, 2002) and political ideology (Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011)- two domains unexplored in children. However, the prior literature has been limited in its explanation of these group difference by what Bronfenbrenner & Crouter (1983) called differences by social address variables. Social address variables are markers of different geographical or social locations through the use of relatively simple labels (e.g. social class, nationality, or race and ethnicity) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). Bronfenbrenner and colleagues argue that the reliance on social address variables alone leaves the true developmental mechanisms underlying group differences unexplored (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thus, an important next step for research on children's understanding of wealth and poverty is to understand what factors may be influencing the different ideas about social class that have been documented between groups. Guided by Bioecological Theory, in this study I chose to focus on their first most proximal context, the home and specifically parents, to help further understand how

children of difference ages from different backgrounds (i.e. political ideology and religious backgrounds)[1] are socialized about social class.

Parental Social Class Socialization

There is a strong tradition within developmental science of examining the significance of influential others in shaping and guiding children's development. As stated above, Bioecological Theory also emphases the role of parents in child development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as does previous work on other prominent social identities in childhood and adolescence; namely, race and ethnicity (Hughes et al., 2006; Quintana & Vera, 1999). However, relatively little is known about how parents talk to children about wealth and poverty.

A small group of studies have pointed to the importance of parents (Flanagan et al., 2014; Hunter et al., 2012), peers (Flanagan et al., 2014), the school context (Mistry, et.al., 2012; Mistry et al., 2016), and the media (Chafel, Fitzgibbons, Cutter, & Burke-Weiner, 1997; Kelley & Darragh, 2011; McGinness, 2008; Streib, Ayala, & Wixted, 2017) in shaping children's burgeoning beliefs and attitudes. For instance, Flanagan and colleagues (2014) surveyed 593 7th-12th graders from the Midwestern United States on their understandings of the causes of poverty, along with questions about their relationships with their parents. Their results indicated that adolescents who reported more frequently discussing current events with their parents had a greater understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality as compared with those who did not report speaking with their parents about current events. While Flanagan and colleague's (2014) study is limited in that it does

[1] Child grade, political ideology, and religious background were chosen for analysis because of the demographics of the sample (see Chapter 2). While I would have liked to also explore variation by social class background, this was not possible with my sample, nor was variation by racial or ethnic background, in that the sample was majority white. Future research should also explore these factors.

not provide insight into the nature of conversations between parents and children, it clearly suggests that conversations with parents can impact children's understandings of the causes of poverty.

Focusing on the role of parents, the family financial literacy literature also provides some insight into how parents do and do not talk about wealth and economic struggle with their children (Danes, 1994; Gudmunson & Danes, 2011; Romo, 2011; 2014). Research suggests that overall parents have rules about what information about family finances they will and will not share with their children (Romo, 2011; 2014). For instance, parents often report feeling comfortable discussing saving money, cost-effective shopping strategies, and issues of macroeconomics (Danes, 1994; Gudmonson & Danes, 2011; Romo, 2011; 2014), but hesitate to share information with their children on family debt or even the details about parent income (Romo, 2011; 2014). Interestingly, the family financial literacy literature also indicates that many parents believe children are not prepared to discuss aspects of family finance until they are at least 12-years-old (Danes, 1994; Gudmunson & Danes, 2011).

The literature on the experiences of low-income families also points to the limits that parents set on conversations about economics when possible (see Quint, Griffin, Kaufman, Landers, & Utterback, 2018 for review). Research indicates that parents living in poverty try to shield their children from the stress and worry of economic hardship (Acker, et al., 2001; Romo, 2011), particularly their younger children (Greenberg, Dechausay, & Fraker, 2011; McLoyd & Wilson, 1992). This of course is not always possible and parents report disclosing information when their children ask about financial struggle (Romo, 2011). Such questions from children make sense, as research suggests that children living in poverty are aware of their family's material deprivation (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Ridge, 2007; Robinson, McIntyre, & Officer, 2005; Trzcinski, 2002; Wade, Shea,

Rubin, & Wood, 2014) and therefore may ask their parents about the differences they observe between their own and others' situations.

Given the dearth of literature on the topic of parent-child socialization about social class, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about how parents discuss these topics with their children. It is clear, however, that parents play an important role in children's developing understanding of social class, based both on theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and the limited literature that does exist on conversations about poverty and financial literacy (Flanagan, et al., 2014; Quint, et al., 2018; Romo, 2011; 2014). Given the potential impact of beliefs and attitudes about social class in childhood (e.g. developing intergroup bias (Horwitz et al., 2014)) and later in life (e.g. voting habits (Bullock et al., 2003) and academic performance (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Croizet & Millet, 2011)), a better understanding of the parent-child socialization process is vital.

Current Study

Given the lacuna in the literature, in my dissertation I had two major research aims:

1. First, I aim to examine how parents socialize their elementary school-aged children regarding topics such as economic hardship and economic inequality.
2. Second, I aim to explore whether there are differences in socialization practices based on the grade of the child (kindergarten, 2nd, or 4th), the political ideology of the parent (liberal versus moderate/conservative), and the religious background of the parent.

In order to meet these aims, I designed and implemented a two-part interview with 26 mostly middle-class white families in a rural area of New England (see Chapter 2 for a complete description of the methods and participants). First, parents and children were observed while they watched and discussed two video clips on families facing economic hardship. Second, parents were interviewed about how they spoke about why families have different amounts of money, family finances, and

helping individuals and families in need. From these two data sources, my research team and I coded the data using inductive and deductive methods to arrive at the major themes of the project, which will be presented in the chapters of this dissertation.

Following the methods and procedures presented in Chapter 2, the three major themes of my dissertation are shared in the three subsequent chapters. The chapters are organized developmentally, starting with empathy development, moving on to helping behavior, and finally focusing on causal attributions. The chapters build on each other, as the ability to understand and take another's perspective are important prerequisite skills for the types of helping behaviors that parents emphasize and may relate to the types of attributions for economic hardship and inequality made by parents and children.

Chapter 3 focuses on the empathy-related socialization practices- a major theme emerged from the parent-child discussion data. In the chapter, I document how discussions between parents and children were dominated by conversations about the emotional states of the video families, connections between their own lives and the lives of video families, and imagining what it would be like to be in the shoes of the families facing economic hardship.

Chapter 4 focuses on helping and charity, another major theme from both the parent-child discussion and the parent interviews. In my mostly middle-class sample, discussions about individuals in need often turned to charity. In their interviews, parents shared how school and religious organizations often organized charitable drives but how family discussions of the reasons for these drives were often brief or lacked depth.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines how parents described their discussions about why families have different amounts of money. I document what sparks conversations, the types of causal attributions parents share for why someone may have more or less, and the topics that families reported

avoiding. I compare these results to the causal attributions made in the parent-child discussions and find that while parents report a diverse array of causal attributions in interviews, in their documented discussions parents were often less clear, avoiding the question of why someone may be experiencing economic hardship.

Overall, I hope that this dissertation provides important insights into how parents broach issues of poverty, economic hardship, and economic inequality with their young children. The data from this study point to a number of important avenues for future research. Finally, I consider how as researchers and educators we could offer more guidance to parents on how to have conversations about economic hardship and inequality, as our results suggests that there are a number of topics that parents rarely or never discuss with their children.

Chapter 2:
Methods

Setting & Participants

Data for this study were collected in Maple Valley[2], a community of towns and villages surroundings Wellsworth College, a rural university in New England. Wellsworth is located in the posh quiet town of Greenley, which has a majority white population (74%) with the remainder of the population being 12% Asian American, 4% Multiracial, 4% African American, 4% Hispanic or Latino/a, and 1% Native American or Native Alaskan (Census, 2015). The median family income for Greenley is approximately $76,000. 19% of residents live at or below the Federal Poverty Line, and 82% of residents hold a Bachelor's degree. In comparison, the surrounding county of Lockland is considerably less racially diverse with 91% of residents being white. However, it does have more SES diversity with 37% of the population having a Bachelor's degree (much closer to the national average of 29%) and a lower median household income of $55,045 (again closer to the national average of $53,482; Census, 2015).

While historically the primary industry in Greenly and the rest of Maple Valley revolved around mills, today the mills have all shut down and Wellsworth and its affiliated medical center are two of the few major employers in the area. This has left a sharp economic divide in Maple Valley. For instance, in the Spring of 2019, while data for this dissertation were being written up, a local website published an article entitled "The Rich versus The Poor of [Maple Valley]: Where Do YOU Land?". The author, writing from Riverview, a former mill town and one of the most economically depressed towns in the valley, started the article saying, "The dichotomy between those with wealth in [Maple Valley] and those who go without, should concern you." This sentiment is echoed by many in the area. Wellsworth, and its affiliated medical center, attract a large number of wealthy,

[2] All places, organizations, and people have been given pseudonyms.

well-educated residents. Beyond the reach of these institutions are the rest of the locals from Maple Valley. They tend, as the demographics cited above imply, to have lower educational backgrounds, make substantially lower incomes, and also to be more conservative in their political and social beliefs. These differences create, as the author of the article implies, a rift between those who are affiliated with Wellsworth, who tend to live in wealthier towns such as Greenley and Charleston, and those who are not. As I describe below, while I recruited from 30 different organizations and reached out to 30 others in an effort to capture this economic diversity, the majority of my sample were from the wealthier half of the Maple Valley income divide.

Participants for the current study were 26 children in kindergarten (n= 9), second (n=9), and fourth grade (n=8) and their parents (N=26 parent-child dyads; see Tables 1 and 2). Children were majority male (n=17) and majority European American (n=22). Parents were majority European American (n=23) and majority female (n=24).[3] While annual family incomes ranged from $25,000 to over $200,000, the majority of parents reported their family's annual income to be between $75,000 and $199,999 (n=18) and only one parent did not have a bachelor (n=8) or graduate (n=17) degree. Parent political ideologies were diverse with parents describing themselves as very liberal (n=6), liberal (n=11), moderate (n=7), and conservative (n=2). In terms of religious background, there were a range of religiously affiliated parents (n=19) with the largest groups being Protestant (n=8) and Unitarian (n=3). We also had 7 parents who reported having no religious affiliation, being Agnostic or Atheist.

Procedures

[3] Two fathers participated as the exclusive parent in the interview. A third included one who was interviewed with his wife and child. The family arrived at the interview together and insisted on all taking part. This was the only two-parent interview that was conducted. For the sake of the parent demographic information reported in Table 1, this father is not counted as his wife filled out the demographics survey and she therefore is included at the respondent parent. His interview data are, however, included in both the parent interview and parent-discussion data.

Recruitment. Recruitment for the dissertation was a long and involved process that was spread out over the nine months when interviews took place (see Appendix A, Table 7 for recruitment locations and those organizations I reached out to but was unable to recruit from). I had planned to recruit from three local schools; however, it quickly became clear that these would not suffice due to limited response from parents in one school and my inability to recruit at all in the other two schools. As seen in Table 7, while I reached out to 60 community organizations, including schools, religious organizations, community ListServs, recreation departments, non-profits, and more, only 30 organizations allowed me to recruit. I tried whenever possible, to find organizations with a diverse array of members and clients across a number of factors: income, religion, political ideology, race/ethnicity. As recruitment progressed and it was clear that my sample lacked many lower income participants, I increased my efforts, going to WIC offices, Head Starts, more non-profits, and community resource fairs. From those 30 organizations, the majority of participants were reached through Listservs (n=10), with others coming from snowball sampling (n=5), religious organizations (n=3), the Lilian Faye School (n=3), basketball practices (n=2), the Lockland County Republican's association (n=2), and the Wellsworth childcare center (n=1).

While recruitment procedures varied some by location (see the Table 7 for notes), it typically took one of three forms: direct recruitment, email, or hanging flyers. In the case of direct recruitment, I went to locations, such as basketball practices, and introduced myself to parents with the direct recruitment/email flyer (see Appendix A Document 1). I would explain the study and answer any questions that families had before asking if they would like to participate. If they agreed I took their contact information and followed up by phone, email, or text message according to their preference. In the case of email recruitment, either I would email a ListServ or my organization contact (e.g. a principal, pastor, or coach) would email their group with my direct recruitment/email flyer. Finally, in some locations like libraries and community boards, I would post a physical

hanging flyer with tabs to rip off with my name and contact information, as seen in Appendix A Document 2. All three types of recruitment involved telling parents the goals of the study, the requirements for participations, the availability of childcare during the interviews, and the renumerations for involvement (a $20 Amazon gift card, a children's book, and mileage reimbursement).

Interviews. Participants were interviewed at their local public library or at the Wellsworth library (their choice) in one hour to hour and a half long research session. Parents chose interview times and parents and their child were present for the interview session. Additionally, I was at every interview along with a trained research assistant[4]. Upon arrival all parents and children were offered water and a snack (i.e. apples). Parents were then verbally taken through the consent form and given a chance to ask questions. They then gave their consent for participation as well as permission for their child. Following this, we explained the procedures to the child and asked for their consent in addition to the permission their parent had just given.

Parent-Child Discussion. All interview sessions began with a shared viewing of two video clips that depicted families experiencing economic hardship (see Appendix B, Document 3 for protocol). The clips were randomly selected from the four possible clips, two of which come from a 2011 Sesame Street episode called "Growing Hope Against Hunger" (Clash, 2011) and two of which come from a 2009 Sesame Street episode called "Families Stand Together" (Preston, 2009), which focuses on job loss; each dyad viewed one clip on hunger and one clip on job loss (see Table 3 for a full summary of all clips). Each clip presents the story of an actual child and his or her family who

[4] In one instance this was not the case due to a miscommunication between the research assistant and me. I asked the mother if she would like to reschedule and she said since the interview was in a one-room public library she was comfortable doing the parent interview out of ear shot of her daughter, who played at the other end of the library in the children's section where would could see her and under the supervision of the librarian, who the mother and child both knew personally.

are experiencing economic hardship. The clips vary by location (rural, urban, suburban), the racial and ethnic background of families, and family composition (e.g. single parent versus married couple; number of siblings). Before viewing, the parent and child were told to watch the video and discuss it as they would if they were watching it at home (pausing the video to ask questions or talk as they like). Following the clip, parents and children were asked to speak with each other about the video they just saw. This procedure was repeated with a second randomly selected video. The session took about 30-40 minutes and all interactions were audio and video recorded.

Piloting. The parent-child discussion procedure was developed through a series of pilot interviews during the spring and summer of 2016 in Los Angeles County. Seven parent-child dyads with children in kindergarten through fourth grade were interviewed. Families were recruited from an economically and racially diverse afterschool program, with the pilot families' yearly household income ranging from under $10,000 to $150,000- $199,999. With each subsequent interview, I adapted and refined the wording of the procedure as well as decided on the final video clips that were used in the dissertation. The clips proved to be age-appropriate and engaging for parents and children.

Additionally, three more pilot interviews were conducted in the fall of 2017 in Maple Valley to ensure that the videos and procedure worked well with a rural population. Again, parents and children were engaged with the videos and had interesting conversations on several different topics.

Parent Interview. To gain greater insight into the socialization practices of parents, all parents were interviewed separately following the parent-child discussion while their child played with a research assistant in a separate space. Books and coloring materials were provided, though often the research assistant and child would play in the children's section of the library. I created an interview protocol using an Ecocultural Family Interview approach (Weisner, 2011) to explore the

types of conversations and activities that young children may be participating in or exposed to at home which may shape their understanding of poverty and economic hardship (see Appendix B, Document 4 for protocol). Parents were asked to share their experiences of talking with their children about why some families have more or less than others, family finances, what it takes to be successful in America, and helping those in need (e.g. Can you tell me about a time when you've talked with your son or daughter about how to help individuals and families in need/ about why families have different amounts of money?). Interviews took 15- 30 minutes and were all audio recorded.

Piloting. The piloting for the parent interview took place in the fall of 2017 prior to the start of data collection. Three parents with elementary school aged students participated in interviews. I refined questions slightly based on this piloting, although overall the questions worked well and parents gave descriptive and rich responses.

Measures

Demographic Information. Following both interview procedures, parents were asked for demographic information on their child (e.g. age, grade, race/ethnicity, gender) and themselves (e.g. age, income, education level, racial and ethnic background; See Appendix B Document 5). Beyond standard measures of SES (i.e. income and education) parents were asked to rate their family's social class position (i.e. poor, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class) (Ostrove & Long, 2007), if they have always been that way and if not, what changed (Mistry et al., 2012). Parents reported their political ideology (e.g. conservative, liberal, republican, democrat) and religious background. They were also asked to provide the same information for an additional adult caregiver (e.g. another parent, stepparent, grandparent) when one was a part of their child's life.

Analysis

Once the data were collected, they were stored on a secure UCLA server according to IRB protocol. Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed using Rev.com. The quality of these transcriptions was checked by a trained research assistant who would listen to three random 30 second exchanges in each interview and read the corresponding transcript. Any discrepancies were corrected and interviews with discrepancies were listened to fully and re-read by a member of the research team to ensure accurate transcriptions. Following transcription, data were put into Excel spread sheets and uploaded to Dedoose, a web-based analysis platform, for coding.

All data were coded by the research team using a procedure similar to that used in previous studies of this topic (Mistry et al., 2016). For the parent interview data, the team developed coding manuals based on reading random selections of participant responses- an inductive approach (Saldaña, 2009) was used for the majority of the data. We developed three different manuals for the parent data: family finances (Questions 1 and 2 from Document 2 in Appendix B), helping (Questions 3 and 6 from Document 2), and economic difference (Question 4 in Document 2). Similarly, we developed a manual for the parent-child data by inductively developing thematic codes based on children's responses. Additionally, in the case of economic difference (i.e. Can you tell me about a time when you've spoken with your daughter/son about why families have different amounts of money?) inductive and deductive coding were used, as we drew on prior work that documents categorization of the responses along three causal attribution types (e.g. individualistic, structural, and fatalistic) in adults (Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011) while at the same time developing codes based on the content of participants' responses. Our process was iterative, taking an average of three months to complete one coding manual. During this three-month period the

research team would meet weekly to discuss a sub-sample of random responses and debate how the coding manual should be amended to better capture the data we were encountering.

This process of reading a sub-set of responses and refining the coding manual was continued until we felt as though the coding manual captured all the themes in the data (see Tables 4, 5, and 6 for themes). At that time, the final coding began. For parent interview data, I coded all the responses to a question using the corresponding manual while a research assistant did the same for 20% of the responses to calculate inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa ranged from .71 to .87). For parent-child discussion data, a research assistant and I each coded half of the data, while double-coding 20% in order to calculate inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa = .88).

Following final coding, the major themes of the dissertation were identified: empathy, helping, and causes of economic difference. I then read through all data related to these topics, starting with examining the frequencies of related codes (i.e. in how many interviews/discussions did a particular code come up) and adding additional layers of description to each code. For instance, while causes of poverty were initially coded as job loss and other than job loss in the parent-child data (see Table 4), I went back and looked to see how the traditional categories of attributions for wealth and poverty used with children (i.e. structural, individualistic, and fatalistic; Mistry, 2000; Mistry et al., 2016; Sigelman, 2012) were represented in these data.

I also used Dedoose to look for variations in the themes by grade, political ideology, and religious background. I did this in two ways. First, I examined the percentages of particular groups (e.g. liberals versus moderate/conservatives) who had been given a specific code in their interview and used these numeric differences to see if one group was mentioning a code substantially more or less than another (e.g. Are a greater percentage of liberals mentioning structural attributions than the percentage of moderate/ conservatives who mentioned structural attributions?). Comparing groups

in qualitative data can be particular challenging (Lindsay, 2019), as statistical analyses are not appropriate for a small sample size but noting group differences can add to our understanding. In this study I decided to present numerical group differences when there is a 20% or greater difference in the type of response, as this seemed like a reasonably conservative difference. However, all percentages are reported for the reader's interpretation. Importantly, in addition to examining the numerical group differences, I also read and took notes on all the examples of a code by subgroup (e.g. I read all structural attributions by liberals and then all the structural attributions made by moderate/conservatives) in order to compare if there were descriptive differences in the types of responses members of each group were giving. For example, while all children labeled emotions during the parent-child discussion, I examined how that emotional labeling looked different descriptively between kindergarten, 2nd, and 4th graders. During this process, other members of the research team who had been involved in the coding process read and provided feedback on the analyses.

Chapter 3:

How would it feel to be in their shoes?
Empathy-related[5] socialization in parent-child conversations about economic hardship

Nev (mother)[6]: Why were they sad?

Wes (kindergarten son): Um, I dunno.

Nev: You don't know? Do you want me to tell you what I think that little clip is about?

Wes: Yeah.

Nev: Yeah. So there was a momma and a papa and 6 kids, right?

Wes: Yeah.

Nev: You saw all the 6 kids. And the momma decided not to work, to stay home with the kids, and so then the papa went to work, and the papa worked a lot, right, and he got money for the family, for working, just like I do, right?

Wes: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nev: Yeah. And then what happened unexpectedly, the papa lost his job. People at his work said we don't need you to work here anymore. So then what happens when you lose your job?

Wes: You have to get a new job.

Nev: What happens if you don't get a new job?

Wes: Then you get a job.

Nev: What does a job give you that your family needs?

Wes: Money.

Nev: Money. So they were sad because they didn't have, they were worried about not having enough money to stay in their house, right?

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[5] I chose to use the phrase "Empathy-Related" as Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky (2013) did. The reason for this will be elaborated in greater detail in the pages that follow, but briefly, the themes in my data are all empathy-related (i.e. emotional labeling and perspective taking) though depending on your definition of empathy they may or may not count as true empathy.

[6] Following viewing of the Valentin Family video clip

The above exchange took place between Nev and her kindergarten son Wes after viewing the video clip on the Valentine family where Mr. Valentine, the father in the clip, just lost his job and the family is struggling to pay their bills (see Table 3 for more details on video clips). This interaction is illustrative of the major trends that came out of our parent-child discussions: parents and children often began conversations by labeling emotions; they considered what the experience of economic hardship was like for the families in the videos; and finally, they made connections between their own lives and those of the families in the videos. In this chapter, I examined how parents used empathy-related socialization practices to enter into conversations about economic hardship with their children and how these conversations varied by the age of children, parent political ideology, and parent religious background.

Literature Review

Empathy: Definitions & Development

What exactly is empathy? When Cuff and colleagues set out to review the literature in 2016 they found 43 different definitions (Cuff, Brown, Taylor, & Howat, 2016). Similarly, Eisenberg and colleagues note that the debate over what is empathy has been taken up by philosophers for generations and is commonplace amongst psychologists who study the topic (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2013). With this in mind, I have decided to use the phrase empathy-related socialization, as used by Eisenberg, to talk about the different practices employed by parents and children in my study because it is at times unclear whether they employ true empathy (i.e. feeling *with* another) versus something-related to but not empathy itself, such as sympathy or perspective taking. For my purposes, I use Eisenberg and colleagues' definition of empathy as "an emotional response that

stems from another's emotional state or condition and is congruent with the other's emotional state or condition," (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 2014, p. 64).

Empathic reactions begin early in humans and can even be seen in their most basic form in newborns (Gibbs, 2013). Hoffman put forward a theory of empathy development used and cited by many in the field (Eisenberg, et al., 2013; Gibbs, 2013). He outlines five stages of empathy development: (1) Newborn reactive cry- Newborns will cry when in reaction to the distress of another. (2) Egocentric empathetic distress- Children will matching emotions of another (e.g. crying when a peer cries) while doing something to calm her/himself but not helping the person in distress (end of 1st year of life) (3) Quasi-egocentric empathic distress- A child offering support to a distressed person that the child her/himself would find comforting (2nd year of life) (4) Veridical empathic distress- When a child can acknowledge that others' feelings may be different from their own but they can still empathize (3rd year of life into the preschool/ early elementary school years) and (5) Empathy for another's experience beyond the immediate situation and distressed groups- understanding that other's feelings may be caused by larger life conditions such as poverty and oppression (five to eight years old; Gibbs, 2013; Kristja´nsson; 2004). The elementary school years are therefore an important time to consider empathetic responses.

Of particular importance for the current study, Eisenberg and colleagues (2014) identify additional cognitive skills that develop alongside and support empathy development. They are: conditioning/ direct association (e.g. a response based on one's prior direct experience), labeling (e.g. recognizing emotions), elaborated networking (e.g. a series of social scripts that one draws on to understand others' experiences and needs), and role taking (e.g. being able to take the perspective of someone else). Other scholars would consider these skills, particularly role taking or perspective taking a form of empathy (i.e. cognitive empathy; Spaulding, 2017). Regardless of how these skills

are labeled- either as a type empathy or as related skills- there seems to be consensus that they are essential for empathy-related development (Eisenberg, et al., 2013; 2014; Spaulding, 2017). Additionally, the literature suggests that these cognitive facilities come online for children from preschool through early elementary school, again highlighting the importance of this period for the current project.

An interesting aspect of cognitive empathy for our purposes is the consideration of group membership. Spaulding (2017) notes that "the cognitive empathy strategies that we use depend on whether we perceive the target to be part of our in- group," (p. 18). For instance, Ames (2004) found that when individuals share more in common with another person, they are more likely to use projection (i.e. their own experience) than stereotypes when trying to reason about that other person's mental state. Spaulding (2017) warns that since cognitive empathy relies on a person imagining what it would be like to be in the shoes of another, there is often a bias towards assuming more similarity between the other person and oneself. Interestingly, we will see that middle-class parents in our sample scaffolded this type of similarity-finding between their child's experiences and the families in the video who were facing financial hardship.

How Adults Support Empathy Development

While empathetic responses are evident even among newborns, socialization also matters for children's empathy development. Harsh discipline has been shown to be negatively associated with empathy development in children whereas parenting practices that encourage perspective taking promote its development (Gibbs, 2013). For instance, Farrant and colleagues (2012) found that parental encouragement of perspective taking when their child had a conflict with a peer was associated with better empathy development in 4 to 6-year-olds.

Hoffman's theory suggests that as children move into elementary school, they develop the capacity to empathize with others based on their life conditions, including economic deprivation (Hoffman, 2001). Recent research with elementary school teachers shows that engendering empathy and perspective taking was a central goal when teaching about wealth and poverty to early elementary grade students (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018). I know of no research to date, however, looking at how parents can or do support their child's ability to empathize with others who are experiencing economic hardship, a primary aim of the current study.

Research Question. Given the lack of research around socialization and empathy development towards those experiencing economic hardship, the central aim of this chapter is to address the following research questions:

1. How do parents cultivate empathy in their discussions of poverty and economic inequality with their elementary school aged children?
2. Does this vary by the age of the child, parent's political ideology, or parental religious background?

Methods

Data in this chapter come primarily from parent-child discussion data. Data were coded inductively (see Chapter 2 for a full description of procedures and coding). Specifically, in this chapter I explore how parents and children emphasize empathy and perspective taking in the parent-child discussion data. Additionally, at the end of the chapter I draw on parent interview data to contextualize the themes seen in the parent-child discussions. Specifically, I draw on the three parent interview questions where empathy development was a prominent theme:

- Many communities have programs and agencies that help families in need. Do you ever have conversations with your daughter/son about such programs in your community?
- People have a lot of different ideas about how to help individuals and families in need in our society. Can you tell me about a time when you've talked with your son/ daughter about how to help individuals and families in need?
- Can you tell me about a time when you've spoken with your daughter/son about why families have different amounts of money?

Results

As stated in the introduction, the exchange between Nev and Wes represent well how parents invoked empathetic reasoning in their children during parent-child discussions. Nev begins the discussion of the Valentin family's experience by ***asking about emotions***, something which all but one dyad in our sample did. She then ***draws parallels between their family and the Valentin family*** ("the papa worked a lot, right, and he got money for the family, for working, just like I do, right?"), something which all families in our sample did. Finally, she asks Wes to ***consider what happens when you lose a job***, a form of role taking/ perspective taking, which occurred in 20 out of 26 parent-child discussions. In the sections that follow, I will elaborate on each of these themes and discuss how they were supported, or expanded upon, by parent interview data.

Labeling Emotions.

The interaction between Nev and Wes started as many parent-child discussions in our data set began their discussions: with labeling emotions. Nev begins with a question about the emotional state of the characters, something which 23 out of the 26 dyads did at some point in their discussions. Her choice to focus on sadness (n = 14) and worry (n =8) was also typical of our

families. Such a question would be familiar to a kindergartener like Wes, as children at this age often spend time identifying their own and others' emotions (Eisenberg, et al., 2014). As was mentioned above, labeling emotions is also seen as a cognitive prerequisite for empathy development (Eisenberg, et al., 2014). Therefore, Nev and other parents in our study may be laying the groundwork for empathy development by asking their child to label how the characters in the video felt.

While many parents, like Nev, discussed sadness, they were also quick to emphasize moments of happiness (n = 15) in their discussions. For example, the two exchanges below, from a 2nd grade and a 4th grade dyad, are typical of how parents guided children to see the sadness and happiness that video families experienced.

> Xenia (mother): Alright. What did you think of it? How did it make you feel?
> Ephraim: Kind of sad but, because they were poor, but yeah.
> Xenia: But they seemed pretty happy didn't they?
> Ephraim: Yeah.
> Xenia: Why do you think they were happy?
> Ephraim: Nutritious food. (laughing)
> Xenia: Right, but I mean they like loved each other a lot it seemed like.

> Hilary (mother): Anything else struck you from the video? Made you think about-
> Teddy: Just sad.
> Hilary: Just sad? But, at the end, did you feel happy?
> Teddy: I felt like, "Yay. Phew."

As in the above examples, parents often countered the sadness they identified in the stories by highlighting the positives. This was so prevalent that "Looking at the positives" became a code in our dataset, occurring in 23 of the 26 interviews.

This turn from sad to happy can be interpreted in different ways. In both cases above, the mothers don't take up their children's comments, which focus on sadness of poverty. This may be

an attempt to avoid a more challenging discussion and instead focus on the positive things that happen with the families. Such a "class blind" approach would mirror the kinds of socialization that have been seen with white parents around issues of race, which they often avoid (Coddington, 2016; Hughes et al., 2006; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). However, it is important to note that parents' emphasis on the positives in the story match the narrative arch of the clips, as described in the methods section. All four clips describe a situation of hunger or job loss but end with an emphasis on the positive (e.g. getting a new job, having extra time with a father who is home and out of work). Therefore, future research could help disentangle if this emphasis on looking at the positive is typical of conversations about economic hardship and poverty or was a result of the video clips used in these interactions.[7]

A final aspect of the exchange with Nev and Wes is worth highlighting, as it points to one of the functions of emotion labeling: Nev does not stop at emotional labeling. Instead, she emphasizes *why* the family might feel that way, something that is not apparent to Wes at first.

> Nev: What does a job give you that your family needs?
>
> Wes: Money.
>
> Nev: Money. So they were sad because they didn't have, they were worried about not having enough money to stay in their house, right?

In doing this scaffolding for Wes, she is supporting his perspective taking development in terms of his ability to comprehend the experience of someone else. This points to one of the roles that emotions played in our data set: they seemed to be an entry point for perspective taking.

[7] It is also interesting to note that references to looking on the positive were more prevalent in the job loss videos than in the hunger videos. While it is impossible to know why, two possibilities are: 1. The hunger videos were sadder than the job loss videos therefore perhaps parents felt more uncomfortable discussing the positives or 2. Perhaps the job loss videos highlighted the positives more as the families were not in as dire of circumstances.

Differences by grade, political ideology, & religious background. It is perhaps not so surprising, given the high prevalence of emotion-related references in the data, that we found no differences in the number of times emotions were discussed by grade, political ideology, and religious backgrounds. In terms of how emotions were discussed, 4th grade dyads reflected more on emotions they would have in the character's shoes (50% as compared to 33% in Kindergarten and 11% of 2nd graders). Additionally, all 4th grade dyads labeled the emotions of characters as compared to 66% of kindergarten and 88% of 2nd grade dyads. This suggests that 4th grade dyads engaged more often in perspective taking as compared to just labeling their own emotional reactions.

Descriptively, while emotions were a common topic at all grade levels, kindergarten and 2nd grade parents tended to ask more directed questions to get children to label emotions, such as Johanna's question to kindergartener Felix, "Did you feel like it was sad? I felt like it was a little sad." 4th grade parents tended to move beyond "Did that make you sad" and spoke in more complex ways even about the more basic emotions, such as Rachel does here.

> I think its sort of sad but it's also I think that a lot of stories that we read like this are sort of, full of hope because it seems like things are not going to work out very well, right? And there's a lot of positive sides to it, so it turns out that you know, that they felt closer to each other, they grew stuff in their garden, they spent more time together, and so actually it turns out to be a positive thing you know? And what do you say about memories and what he can take with him?

This is markedly different from the kind of "sad" comment that Johanna made to Felix and shows how 4th graders and their parents had more nuanced conversations, even if they were still focused on the basic emotions such as sadness.

Drawing Parallels Between Own Lives and Characters Lives.

Another aspect of Nev and Wes' conversation is subtle; Nev mentions in passing that the father works a lot to get money for the family just like she does. However, this was a common way that parents in our sample tried to connect their lives to the lives of the families they were watching

in the clips. These connections included those unrelated to poverty (n= 26; e.g. having bunk beds, playing basketball), similarities between the video families and other children or families in their communities who are experiencing economic difficulty (n=12), and similarities with the economic struggle experienced by their own family (n=7, e.g. parents, grandparents, etc.).

General Connections. Like the quote from Nev, all dyads (n=26) spoke about similarities between their family and the video families in terms of general life conditions unrelated to economic struggle. These included things like the foods they ate (n=10), their home (n=8), their family composition (n=7), and work (n=6). For example, Breanne prompts her 2nd grade daughter Jenna to think about the similarities between her life and Jafir's, the little boy in the video they just watched.

> What did you think? You don't know. You know what I thought, that made me so feel too much? All the kids and their mom and dad together. It made me think about going through school and how much you helped me. Right?

In making such comparisons, parents like Breanne may be trying to support their child's empathy development. At first glance Jafir's life may seem very different from Jenna's: he is a young Black boy living in an impoverished urban neighborhood in Plainfield, New Jersey while Jenna is a young white girl living on the rural campus of a New England prep school in Maple Valley where her parents are both teachers. However, Breanne points out how both children have helped their mothers while the moms go to school to improve their family's economic position. We know from the literature that when people view others as more similar to themselves, they are better able to practice perspective taking (Ames, 2004; Spaulding, 2017). Such comparisons, while small, may help children empathize with the video children and support their perspective taking abilities.

Economic Struggle. Some parents went beyond general life similarities and pointed to the ways in which families in their community (n= 12) and even their own families (n=7) had struggled economically. When speaking about families in their communities who struggle economically, some

parents and children discussed friends who they knew well. For instance, here Sean and 2nd grade son Philip talk about children they know in the community who live in poverty.

Sean: Do you know anyone who has things like that going on in their life that's hard for them? Any of your friends?

Philip: Yeah, Simon.

Sean: Simon?

Philip: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Sean: Yeah? What sort of stuff.

Philip: He just, he just has a really hard time because he lives on a farm and it's just, so boring and stuff.

Sean: Or Joshua, right?

Philip: Yeah.

Sean: He must have had a really hard time before they got a doctor.

Philip: Yeah.

In the exchange, Sean has Philip recall different scenarios of individuals they know who have had trouble economically. This technique may help Philip empathize with the video family (in this case the Valentin's) as he suggests that their experiences are similar to those of people Philip knows and cares about.

Other families spoke more generally about families within their communities, talking about the existence of poverty, how families in the community have to use services such as free and reduced-priced lunch, visit food pantries, or in some cases the larger problem of rural poverty. Here Esther and 4th grader Molly speak about rural poverty and explore some of the reasons why it may be a problem in their community.

Molly: I know. Some ... so ... it seems like people around here in the more rural areas are having a little bit more trouble?

Esther: Yeah. We can be sometimes. There's not as many jobs, not big companies to work at. Most of the people in our area work at Wellsworth College or Pinnacle Corp.

Molly: What's Pinnacle Corp?

Esther: It's a company. I can't remember what they do. They manufacture something. So those are the biggest companies I think in our area, and so when they're full up of jobs there's, you know, what else is there to do? You know, it can be difficult to find a job and ...

Molly: All I'm thinking of is ... all I can seriously think of is McDonald's and Walmart and maybe that Vietnamese place, but they don't pay very much.

This exchange is representative because Molly and Esther are speaking about their community more broadly. As we will see in Chapter 5, their more in-depth discussion of the causes of rural poverty is something that occurred less frequently between parents and children.

Finally, 7 dyads discussed experiences of economic struggle within their own family. A few families spoke about grandparents who had struggled, others spoke about their experiences of economic struggle prior to when their children were born or when their children were young, and one family spoke about the struggle the foster child in their family faced when he lived with his biological parents. In most cases, these seemed like novel conversations for parents and children, as is the case here as Caty and Aimee discuss Caty's experience on WIC for the first time.[8]

Caty: Yeah. Do people like ... Do places like that exist here?

Aimee: Yeah.

Caty: Yeah. Did you know that we had that happen with us? In our family?

Aimee: When?

Caty: So when daddy and I were both students and we were studying, do you think we made any money? We didn't have jobs, right? But we still had you. So when we were students and daddy and I were just studying, we didn't have any money. So we asked the government to help us.

Aimee: What did the government do?

[8] We know this is the first time because Caty discussed it in her parent interview.

Caty: There's a program called Women, Infants and Children, which is a program that's designed to be like a food pantry. It helps and gives, gives money and food to people that don't have enough to feed their children.

Aimee: Like you guys?

Caty: Like we were. Yeah. And we got milk and cereal and vegetables and I brought it home to you in boxes.

Aimee: Really?

Caty: Yeah.

Caty is very open with her daughter about the experience and answers her questions. Similar to the discussions of others in the community, or even non-economic connections, it seems as though this exchange serves to help Aimee see that the video family is just like hers. One might imagine that such personal connections, however, go even farther in reducing the stereotypes Aimee may hold towards individuals who struggle economically as she now knows that her family – in spite of being financially stable now- has gone through a very similar experience.

Differences by grade, political ideology, & religious background. In looking at differences between groups in the types of personal connections dyads discussed, unsurprisingly, there were none in terms of the general life connections- as all 26 dyads made these. Descriptively, we also saw no differences in terms of political orientation and religious background for personal connections about general life conditions. The only difference was that kindergarten dyads made more of these connections per parent-child discussion than did 2nd or 4th grade dyads.

We did find differences, however, by grade, political ideology, and religious background in the connections they made regarding economic struggle. The most pronounced difference we observed was by grade. Kindergarten dyads spoke less about economic struggle and poverty in their community (33%) and in their family (11%) than did 2nd (community= 55.5%; family= 33%) and 4th graders (community= 50%; family = 37.5%). Descriptively this was the case as well. In terms of

poverty and economic struggle in their communities, the three kindergarten dyads who brought up the topic only discussed local organizations that assisted families struggling in their community. For instance, here Jessica describes her volunteer work to her son Milo.

> Well, after you go to bed, mama goes and volunteers at a shelter, that also has a Food Shelf. And the shelter's for people who don't have homes, and the Food Shelf is for people that can't afford to buy food.

In terms of family connections, the one kindergarten dyad who brought this up only spoke about the experience of their foster sibling. For both themes, 2nd and 4th grade dyads had more extensive conversations which covered a greater set of topics. Below Rachel and Alexandra speak both about the poverty in their community, and their personal connection to economic struggle through the experiences of their foster siblings.

> Rachel: It was neat to see for me, she was teaching them the ABCs and she's teaching lots of good things, right?
>
> Alexandra: Yeah
>
> Rachel: That really makes a difference too, I mean think about this ; we live in a place where maybe it's not so depressed although I think that in Devon [larger town] we might not see it but I think that there are people who can't make ends meet, and things like that –
>
> Alexandra: Yeah
>
> Rachel: You know that Penny and Duncan (foster siblings), who didn't get exposed to a lot of that stuff, right? Penny doesn't know her ABCs, but those little kids are learning their ABCs even though their mom and dad can't buy things for them, that goes along way, just them caring for their education.

While Alexandra is rather quiet in this exchange, Rachel makes a point of bringing in issues of general poverty in the community as well as comparing the struggles of Jafir's family to those of the foster children in their care, Penny and Duncan.

We also saw differences in terms of how liberals and moderates/conservatives spoke about economic struggle within their communities. 53% of liberal dyads spoke about this while only 33%

of moderate/conservative dyads brought it up. Finally, in terms of religious background 40% of religiously affiliated dyads spoke about personal experiences of economic struggle compared to 14% (1 of 7) non-religiously affiliated dyads. Descriptively, however, there were no differences between responses by political ideology, nor religious background.

In their shoes: Perspective Taking and Parent-Child Discussions

Finally, Nev and many other parents asked their children to consider what it might be like to be in the shoes of the video families. Such discussions were common, evident in 20 of the 26 parent-child dyads and across all grade levels at relatively similar rates (Kinder, n=6; 2nd, n=7; 4th, n=7). Parents almost exclusively initiated this type of perspective taking (n = 19 of 20 parents). For example, here Lacey asks her son Walker to think about what it might be like to be like for Josie, a 7-year-old girl from the video whose single-parent father struggles to provide enough food for her to eat.

Lacey: Do you think it's hard to be somebody like Josie?

Walker:Yeah.

Lacey: What do you think might be hard for him? Hard to maybe learn at school when you're hungry you think?

Walker:Yeah.

While brief, these types of exchanges happened repeatedly in the parent-child discussions, with parents almost exclusively taking the lead. In contrast, only 3 of the 20 dyads who spoke about perspective taking in this way had a child initiate the conversation. Dyads did vary, however, in what aspect of the video family's narrative they focused this perspective-taking activity on.

Parents most often (n=8) asked children about what it would be like to move homes, which was referenced across all four video clips.[9] Parents and children often focused on the concrete aspects of moving, such as where their child would sleep or the possessions they would have to get rid of. For example, here Esther initiates a conversation with 4th grade daughter Molly about what it would be like for the family to downsize into an apartment.

> Esther: So, if Daddy lost his job and I lost my job, and we worked at those places and maybe we could work as much as we could, we probably wouldn't be able to cover all of the costs that we have. We'd have to move out of our house into an apartment, and we'd have to get rid of the chickens and the kitty.
>
> Molly: Don't give them away. Sell them, definitely.
>
> Esther: Yeah. Get rid of most of our stuff to be able to fit into the apartment.

This exchange is representative for the majority of our middle-class sample. Esther and her daughter discuss the concrete aspects of moving, not having enough money to meet their needs, and the possibility that they may have to sell some of their possessions- all of which came up in multiple interviews. A good point of comparison, however, is how Fiona and her daughter Emmy- the only dyad in our sample who were known to be struggling financially- discussed the possibility of having to downsize.

> Fiona: What would you do if we had to move to a smaller place?
>
> Emmy: I don't know.
>
> Fiona: Can't get much smaller than our apartment, can you?
>
> Emmy: No.
>
> Fiona: (laughs) Well, you can actually.
>
> Emmy: Yeah but that would be really small.

[9] See Table 3 for a description of the clips. Josie's Family and the Bailey Family both move because they cannot afford their homes. The Valentin Family clip talks about bills and being able to afford their home, though they don't have to move. Jafir's family does not lose their home, although the mother Patricia does discuss wanting to move her family to a "better neighborhood".

Fiona: That would be really small. What if we had to share a bedroom?

Emmy: No.

Fiona: (laughs) It would be hard if you had to get rid of a lot of things, huh, and move to a smaller place like they did.

As you can see, while Fiona and Emmy discuss similar themes to those that the middle-class participants did, they also briefly acknowledge that their home is already fairly small. While we did not ask participants what kind of accommodations they lived in, Fiona and Emmy were the only dyad to mention that they lived in an apartment. Almost all other families discussed living in houses, typical of middle- and upper-class residents in Maple Valley. This highlights the need to further investigate how lower income families may discuss these topics, as their lived experiences may more closely mirror that of the families in the videos.

As both of the above dyads mentioned, having to get rid of possessions was also a common theme. Six families discussed having to sell possessions. For instance, below Colin and Erica try to have their kindergarten son Frank imagine what it would be like to have to sell some of his favorite toys: Legos.

Colin: What do you think we'd do if we had that happen Frank? You think we could have a yard sale with Legos?

Erica: Wait a minute. Would you sell your Legos if dad wasn't making money? No?

Frank: I would get more then.

Erica: How would you get more Legos if dad wasn't making money?

Frank: If we sell them.

Erica: Oh, oh, oh.

Colin: If we had to sell them to buy food...

Erika: You would use the money from the Legos to buy more Legos? Do you think that would be the best choice?

Frank: No.

Such discussions of possessions are developmentally appropriate, especially for the youngest children in the sample like Frank, who typically think about wealth and poverty in terms of possessions (Chafel, 1997).

Similar to Colin and Erika, a number of parents spoke about why they might have to move or sell their possessions, mainly in the form of not having enough money (n=6) or having lost a job (n=6). Below, Hilary has her 4th grade son Teddy imagine what might happen if his father lost his job- as had two of the four families in the videos (see Table 3).

Hilary: What do you think would happen? What would give in that situation? … Would I have to work full-time?

Teddy: We'd have to go to daycare.

Hilary: You'd have to go to class after school. The after-school program.

Teddy: Yeah. But wait. Daycare? How long is that? For how kids? Like, what age kids?

Hilary: Younger. Younger, but in our situation, Nessa would have to go to daycare, and you guys would have to go to class. And, then in the summers, you'd have to go to [camp] full-time, and yeah. We'd have to find childcare…

Teddy: Wait. How would you pay for ... If we were in this situation, how would you pay for [camp]?

Hilary: Well, they have scholarships. If you can't afford to pay the full price, you can apply for a scholarship. And, I think-

Teddy: But, what's a scholarship again?

Hilary: Financial help. And, if you can prove that you can't afford to pay the full amount, then they'll subsidize it, or help you pay, the tuition, or the camp rate. So, I think a lot of the kids, at [camp], that you are with, their parents have to work, all summer long. They don't get summers off, so they qualify for financial assistance to go there. And so, the parents use it as childcare, and then the kids have a lot more fun than sitting at home, all summer long, doing nothing.

This exchange between Hilary and Teddy, while more expansive than most, shows how this exercise in perspective taking helped children think through the consequences of job loss. For Teddy, this meant clarifying what types of financial supports might be available to families who were struggling economically but still needed childcare. In the case of Leo, also a 4th grader, talking about what it might be like to have his father lose his job afforded his mom Stacey the opportunity to correct some faulty attributions he held about job loss.

Stacey: What if dad came home and said, "I lost my job today." What would you think?

Leo: I would be mad at him.

Stacey: Why?

Leo: Cause. He might not be good at working.

Stacey: You think maybe he might have done something wrong?

Leo: Yeah.

Stacey: It sounds like this person didn't do anything wrong. Just where he worked had to cut people back because maybe they needed to save money.

Leo: Oh.

Stacey: So, it doesn't sound like he did anything wrong.

Stacey used this moment to help expand Leo's understanding of why people may lose their jobs, and in doing so combatted some stereotypes about job loss that he held. In Chapter 5, we will see how moments such as this were rare, and parents often did not dig deeper to unpack the reasons for job loss with their children.

Differences by grade, political ideology, & religious background. As stated in the beginning, parents with children in each grade level asked children to imagine being "in their shoes" at the same rates (Kinder, n=6; 2nd, n=7; 4th, n=7). We also did not observe any differences descriptively- with parents mostly taking the lead and having their children imagine similar situations across all grade levels. Political ideology was also not a major distinguishing factor for this theme

with 71% of liberal compared to 88% of moderate/conservative parent dyads. We did however see a difference when it came to religious background. Parents who did not report a religious background (i.e. Atheist, Agnostic, or none) promoted perspective taking 57% of the time as compared to 83% of dyads with a parent with religious background. Descriptively, there was no difference in the content of these conversations.

Parents' perspectives: Conversations at home.

Critical to the design of my dissertation was the use of two data sources: parent-child discussion to document in real time what conversations looked like and parent interview, to help get a sense of parents' goals and interactions outside of the research context. In examining the parent interview data, we find support for the fact that empathy-development is an important goal for parents. In their interviews, over a third of parents spoke about the importance of empathy in their discussions with their children about how to help individuals and families in need (n=10). Overall these parents were more likely to have children in younger grades (kinder=55%, 2^{nd}= 44%, 4^{th}= 0) and be liberal (41% of dyads compared to 22% of moderate/conservative). While all 10 of these parents spoke about the importance of empathy and perspective taking, they did so in three distinct ways: understanding the behavior or situation of others (n=4), helping their child understand his/her own privilege (n=3), and charity (n=3).

Four parents spoke about how they want their children to understand or be sensitive to others, such as peers or siblings who are acting out. For example, here Amber explains how empathy is an important value for her to cultivate in kindergarten son Noah, particularly in the context of understanding the behavior of his foster siblings.

> Well I think he's learning firsthand to be compassionate, and to have empathy. I think learning empathy is important. And then I think acting on it, and I think he's seeing that. Even if he has a difficult time when some of the foster kids are not nice, or taking his things, or having temper tantrums. A lot of times they'll come up with toys, and then it's hard for my kids because they're jealous that the other kids have toys. And then we talk about, "Oh, he has to be without his mom. How do you think that makes him feel? Maybe the stuff

> animal helps him feel like he's closer to his mom." So, I think learning that empathy and tolerance, and then trying to live that.

Similarly, other parents discussed that they want their children to be empathetic and learn to think about what might be happening in the lives of others that makes them act the way they do. This perspective taking is a critical developmental milestone for children (Eisenberg, et al., 2014) and it is clear that parents are connecting this to how they want their children to relate to individuals in need.

Three parents emphasized how important it was for their children to understand the privilege they have. This came up in general terms with Xenia who said it was important "to remind them how lucky they are. I might say that they're lucky and that not everybody's as lucky as they are." Caty spoke about how it was important for her to give daughter Aimee a broader global perspective, "we have it pretty great, not just we, but everyone who lives here has it pretty great compared to other people elsewhere, in our country and out of our country." Finally, Johanna spoke about the importance of speaking to Felix and his brother about their privilege as white boys.

> I think it starts really young, which is that I want them to be empathetic, especially because they're boys. Especially because of the world that we live in. And I think that I want them to know that they have an advantage that because they're white boys, and I want them to always be looking for ways that they can be there for someone else. Even if it's just being friendly to someone, listening to someone, or if it's trying to see if there's anything concrete they can do.

All three of these mothers identified as politically liberal, though their children are in different grades (kindergarten and 2nd) and from different religious backgrounds.

Finally, a group of parents focused on empathy development in the context of charity. As we will see in the next chapter, charity is a major context for socialization about poverty for the families in our sample. For two of these families these families, the charity was done in the context of the winter holidays (i.e. Christmas and Hanukkah). The third, Amanda, spoke about the importance of her kindergarten daughter Lucy understanding who it was who benefits from charity.

> It's important to me that when we go to the Mission to drop things off that both kids are with me because I don't want helping others to be theoretical. They need to see firsthand that this isn't some faceless other. This is the kid in your math class or this is the older woman that we see wandering around. These are people who are real people who have needs that we can help in a small way from our individual family.

Interestingly all three parents who spoke about charity had children in Kindergarten. This may make sense developmentally, as kindergarten-aged children tend to focus more on the concrete aspects of wealth (Chafel, 1997) so tying these lessons to concrete activities such as donations.

Overall, the parent interview data supported the themes that we saw in the parent-child data, in that empathy is clearly and critical component to parent-child discussions about individuals and families in need. Interestingly however, the themes of privilege and charity were more pronounced in the parent interview data; two themes we will explore in greater depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have laid out how empathy-related socialization was a hallmark of parent-child discussions about economic hardship and something that parents themselves identified as an important goal in their individual interviews. In response to video clips about families who were struggling economically, parents often asked children to label emotions and to try to understand the perspective of characters. This is developmentally appropriate, as the early elementary school grades are a time marked by empathy development and associated cognitive skills such as emotion labeling and perspective taking (Eisenberg, et al., 2014). I also saw evidence that parents often tried to quickly move from the sadness of poverty to other more positive aspects of the videos. While this may reflect the narrative arch of the videos (see above discussion), it is also possible that it is evidence of a "class blind" approach to socialization, wherein parents steered discussions away from some of the more difficult aspects of economic hardship.

It was also apparent from the data that parents were helping structure conversations in a way to scaffold their middle-class children's ability to take the perspective of children and families who

were struggling economically. Specifically, parents asked children to imagine what it would be like to be in the shoes of these families having them think through specifics such as what it would be like to lose their home. Parents also tried to make connections between their own lives and the lives of families in the videos, both through everyday aspects of life such as food and hobbies to shared experiences of economic hardship. Both of these practices hint at parents' awareness that taking the perspective of an outgroup member, in this case a child from a different social class, can be difficult, even for adults (Ames, 2004; Spaulding, 2017). Future research might consider how children of different social class backgrounds are able to take the perspective of peers from different rungs of the economic ladder. Such research would allow us to better understand the limitations that children might have relating from others from different social groups and also point to an area where adults could offer support, as the parents in this study did.

In terms of group differences, child grade level was the most consistent group difference in our dataset. For instance, while all children discussed emotions, 4th grade dyads had more nuanced discussions that went beyond simply labeling emotions. Dyads with older children (2nd and 4th graders) were also more likely to discuss personal connections to economic struggle, both in their communities and at home. Inversely, I found in the parent interviews that parents with younger children (kindergarten and 2nd graders) were more likely to mention empathy as an important value or lesson they wanted to impart to children. Such a developmental pattern makes sense, in that the early elementary school years are an important time for children's empathy development (Eisenberg, et al., 2014). While parents may think more about empathy development with their younger children, who are still developing the cognitive skills that support empathy development (Eisenberg, et al., 2014), it was clear that empathy-related socialization was going on across all grade levels but in ways that tried to match children's abilities.

I also found group differences by religious background. Specifically, we found that religious parents were more likely to engage in perspective taking as well as make personal connections to economic struggle in parent-child conversations. While little research has examined the relationship between religious affiliation and empathy, a recent review of the adult literature suggests that spirituality is related to higher levels of empathy while religious fundamentalism is related to lower levels of empathy (Bradley, 2009). Similarly, Frances and colleagues (2012) found that adolescents' images of God as either merciful or justice-seeking were related to their levels of empathy, with those holding the image of a merciful God having higher levels of empathy. Given the limited information we have on the religious beliefs of families, I cannot generalize our findings in any way. However, future research looking at the relationship between empathy, religious practice, and economic hardship may help us understand the various socializing forces in children's lives.

Finally, in terms of group differences, liberal parents were more likely than moderate/conservative parents to make personal connections to economic struggle in their parent-child discussion and were also more likely to bring this up in their parent interview. This finding is in line with a recent study done by Hasson and colleagues which looked at empathy and political orientation in the US, Israel, and Germany. The authors found that liberals in all three countries wanted to feel more empathy, experienced more empathy, and wanted to help others more than conservatives (Hasson, Tamir, Brahms, Cohrs, & Halperin, 2018). For this sample, it is important to note that in spite of recruiting efforts amongst liberal (Democratic and Worker's Parties) and conservative (Republican and Tea Parties) groups in Maple Valley (see Chapter 2 for more on recruitment), my current sample is not politically balanced with a liberal skew. Given this, future research should first and foremost consider political ideology when looking at socialization practices with empathy and economic hardship. Rarely does research with young children consider the political environment in their home. Additionally, efforts should be made to diversify our research

samples to include participants from across the political spectrum to better understand the role that political ideology is playing in shaping the empathetic development of children.

Overall, in this chapter I found that empathy-related socialization is a hallmark of parent-child discussions of economic hardship and a primary goal of many parents when they talk about economic differences. Conversations differed primarily by the grade of children, but also by political ideology and religious background of the parent. An important aspect of empathy to consider as we conclude is the relation it has to prosocial behavior such as helping others. Many scholars have examined the link between empathy and prosocial behavior, findings that indeed empathy and empathy-related responses like sympathy can motivate prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, et al., 2013). Therefore, given the centrality of empathy to the parent-child discussions, in the next chapter we will consider how parents and children spoke about helping individuals and families in need.

Chapter 4:

Charity begins at home: Parental discussions of helping individuals and families in need with elementary school students

Introduction

As I discussed in the last chapter, elementary school is a time when children make major strides in the development of empathy and the ability to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015). Indeed, in their 2016 review of empathy, Cuff and colleagues include some definitions that go beyond merely understanding and appreciating the emotional or psychological state of another, and hint at action, such as this one by Geer, Estupinan, & Manguno- Mire (2000), "The ability to perceive another person's point-of-view, experience the emotions of another and behave compassionately. (p. 101)" Therefore, given the important role of empathy development in parent-child conversations, the question of how parents socialize their children to help those experiencing economic hardship is an essential one for this study, and a topic that has not been well-researched to date. The aim of this chapter is to understand the contexts in which discussions of helping those in need come up for children and parents and what is discussed during such conversations. To do this I draw primarily on interviews with parents, however data from parent-child discussions will be used throughout to demonstrate how these conversations play out between parents and children.

How children discuss helping individuals living in poverty. The literature on how children believe we should help individuals and families living in poverty is relatively small (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1983; Mistry, et al., 2016). These studies have typically asked children through open-ended interviews how they feel individuals and societies should

support or help individuals from low-income backgrounds (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1983; Mistry, et al., 2016).

The limited literature in this area suggest that even young children have ideas about helping individuals from low-income backgrounds (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Elenbaas, 2019; Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1983; Mistry, et al., 2016). These ideas tend to have a developmental trajectory, moving from being more egocentric to more structural over the course of childhood (Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1983). For example, Mistry and colleagues (2016) found that while all children in their study overwhelmingly endorsed the idea of helping, with over 80% of their kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade sample saying that we should help, 1st and 2nd grade students whose teachers had implemented a curriculum discussing wealth and poverty were more likely to mention more varied ways to help that went beyond giving money (e.g. donations, charity, and education).

There is, however, reason to believe that children's helping ideas vary depending on their own social class background (Enesco et al., 1995; Leahy, 1983) and the discussions that they have with adults (Mistry, et al., 2016). For instance, Enesco and colleagues (1995) documented how children in Spain (ages 6-16) suggested helping individuals living in poverty. While their results support the aforementioned developmental trend (e.g. younger children tend to emphasize more egocentric ways of helping as compared to older children) they also observed a difference in responses based on children's own social class background (Enesco et al, 1995). On average, children from lower-income backgrounds were more likely to suggest that individuals living in poverty should help themselves, while no children from a middle-class background suggested this solution (Enesco, et.al., 1995).

Given this research, it appears that elementary school aged children have ideas about helping individuals living in poverty, although these ideas may vary with age and, potentially, by the

background of children. More research is needed, however, before scholars can understand how ideas about helping those living in poverty develop in middle childhood.

Parental discussions of helping those in need. The question of how parent should, or do, talk to children about how to help individuals and families living in poverty is one that has been tackled by few developmental researchers. There is, however, some literature on how parents talk about charitable giving with their children. Additionally, an even smaller literature has begun to examine how parents, particularly those receiving benefits, discuss public benefits receipt with children.

Charitable giving. One field which has taken up the question of why and how we give is philanthropic studies. Philanthropic studies examines charitable giving across a number of academic fields including sociology, psychology, economics, marketing, anthropology, and more (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). Within philanthropic studies, there is a consensus that for children, parents and other primary care givers play an important role in socializing their children to becoming philanthropic (see Bjorhovde, 2002 for review). Specifically, in her review of the philanthropic literature with children Bjorhovde argues that philanthropic socialization has greater impact when caregivers are knowledgeable about the philanthropic act and can explain the cause and results of the philanthropy (Bjorhovde, 2002).

Research also suggests that parents believe volunteering and charitable giving are important for their children to learn about (Bjorhovde, 2002; Fidelity, 2014; Imagine Canada, 2017). For instance, a 2017 Canadian survey found that 89% of parents reported the importance of inspiring their children to give to charities and 79% reported speaking to their children about charitable giving (Imagine Canada, 2017). Similarly, research in the US has found that Americans generally, and

parents specifically, think that volunteering and charitable giving are good for children (Bjorhovde, 2002).

However, other research suggests that parents fall short of their socialization goals, often failing to engage their child in volunteering or charitable giving (Bjorhovde, 2002; Central Carolina Community Foundation, 2011). For instance, a 2010 poll of children 17 and under by TheMint.org (a website promoting financial literacy) found that 64% of children did not know how their parents supported charitable organizations (TheMint.org, 2010). Similarly, a review of the literature found that in spite of thinking philanthropy is important, parents often report that their children are not engaged in philanthropic behavior (Bjorhovde, 2012). This begs the question, where does this disconnect come from and what lessons about the value of philanthropy are children learning?

Government Benefits. In her review of philanthropic studies, Bjorhovde states, "we must help [children] learn how they, as individuals, can and should make a difference to society through their own personal efforts," (Bjorhovde, 2002, p. 8). It is clear from this statement that philanthropic studies, while a broad multidisciplinary field, focuses on individuals and individualistic forms of help. However, structural forms of help such as government benefits are another important source of support for individuals and families living in need. To date, I have found no research that examines how parents from middle- and upper-class backgrounds discuss these supports with their children.

There is, however, a small body of literature examining the experiences of parents from low-income backgrounds (see Quint, et al., 2018 for review.) For instance, a study by Greenberg and colleagues (2011), looked at parents' participation in a conditional cash transfer program. They found that parents were hesitant to explain this program to their younger children, while adolescents were more well-informed. This is similar to the literature suggesting that low-income parents are

more comfortable talking about economic struggle with older children than younger children (McLoyd & Wilson, 1992). In their review of the experiences of low-income families receiving benefits, Quint and colleagues (2018) also found that parents had very mixed experiences, with many parents experiencing shame and stigma associated with benefits receipt. While this does not tell us explicitly what they share with their children, one might imagine that such difficult experiences would be hard to share.

Summary. It is clear from the limited literature in this field that charitable giving is seen by parents as a valuable activity and one in which they would like their children to participate (Bjorhovde, 2002; Imagine Canada, 2017). However, it also seems clear that parents fall short of this socialization goal (Bjorhovde, 2002; TheMint.org, 2010), though research is unclear as to why that might be. Finally, we know almost nothing about how parents speak to their children about more structural forms of helping individuals and families in need, though the scant research in that area suggests that parents who receive benefits may be less inclined to talk with their younger children about such programs (Greenberg, Dechausey, & Fraker, 2011).

Current Study

Given the lacuna in the literature outlined above, the central aim of this chapter is to examine how parents and their children talk about helping individuals and families in need both in terms of charitable giving and government support. Specifically, my research questions are:

1. How do parents and their elementary school aged children discuss helping individuals and families in need?
2. Do these discussions vary by the grade of the child or family background characteristics such as parent political ideology or family religion?

Methods

To address the questions in this chapter, data come from both the parent interview and the parent-child discussion (see Methods in Chapter 2 for full details on interviews, participants, and coding procedures). Specifically, I draw on responses to the following questions from the parent interviews:

- Many communities have programs and agencies that help families in need. Do you ever have conversations with your daughter/son about such programs in your community?
- People have a lot of different ideas about how to help individuals and families in need in our society. Can you tell me about a time when you've talked with your son/ daughter about how to help individuals and families in need?

Additionally, references to charity came up in the opening part of the interview when discussing family finance (i.e., In the past week can you tell me about any conversations with your son/daughter about money?). I use parent-child data to highlight how themes and developmental trends played out in observed conversations between parents and their children.

Results

What sparks discussions of helping at home?

As described in the methods section, parents were asked specifically about times they had spoken to their child about organizations in their community that help individuals and families in need, as well as conversations they have had about how to help individuals and families in need. From these questions, it became clear that there were certain conversational sparks (i.e. events or circumstances that prompt conversations) which were common amongst our participants and started many home conversations about helping individuals in need.

Donations to charities were far and away the most common conversational spark that parents mentioned. While 12 out of 26 parents mentioned direct donations made to charities (see

Table 5)- even more parents (n=19) discussed donations made in the context of school (n=10), neighborhood or community events (n=5), and religious organizations (n=7). For instance, Johanna described how conversations came up saying, "I feel like when they come up because of school things, like they have school, you know, they'll say, 'Oh, we're collecting money for, or we're collecting cans for the Mission [a local charity organization]." Johanna's description of the conversation is apt, as it shows another important aspect of discussions of charitable giving: discussions were often brief or lacking in depth. Nicole discussed this directly, saying

> I think we don't necessarily initiate conversations at home, but because he's exposed to these different food drives and things, he'll bring a little slip home. And we'll say, "Okay, let's go and ... Oh, we have some coats that don't fit anymore. Let's grab those, and you can bring those into school and participate in that event." So, I think he's aware of it, and he's aware that our family participates, but we don't necessarily directly see the programs, like in action anywhere.

Alternatively, Rose, the mother of a kindergartener, spoke about how such school drives helped her realize that her daughter did not quite understand what a food shelf was, which spurred further conversation.

> They did a food drive this fall in Kindergarten and in the course of the conversation and we brought it in, like non-perishables, and she said that she put them on the food shelf and I said, "Oh, did you get to go to it?" And she said, "No, it's just in the classroom," so I don't think that quite got there. So then we had a conversation about what a food shelf is, where a food pantry or food bank, and we've talked about donating clothes and food to other food banks or shelters.

Not only did conversations come up in the school context through donation drives, but four parents mentioned school as a place where their children noticed economic differences, primarily through peers receiving free or reduced priced meals. Breanne explained this saying

> Breanne: She knows that kids at her school get free breakfast and lunch and stuff like that.
>
> Interviewer: Do you ever have explicit conversations about that, or is it just something she's more aware of?
>
> Breanne: We've talked about it. She asked me once why some of the kids eat breakfast at school. And I said, "Some of them just like to eat breakfast at school, and some of them live in families where the parents can't buy them breakfast."

Therefore, both in terms of donation drives and exposure to peers from different economic backgrounds, school served as an important spark for conversations about helping individuals and families struggling economically.

Community wealth (e.g. visible wealth or poverty within the community) was also cited by parents as a spark for conversations about helping. For instance, four parents discussed how their children knew about extreme poverty because their jobs exposed them to poverty within the community (e.g. a hospice nurse and a firefighter). Other parents commented on how seeing individuals in poorer areas of the valley prompted conversations, such as the below situation described by Fiona.

> We were with a friend and her son, who is a little bit younger than Emmy. We were in Burnley and there was someone there begging for change or begging for money. The little boy that we were with said, "Well, we shouldn't give him any money because he's gonna ... because he's gonna spend it on drugs." The other mom and I were kind of like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Let's not judge. Whenever I can, I give people money that are asking for money. I tell Emmy that if you can do a little something, you should, I guess. (1015)

It is important to remember that Maple Valley is a community with great levels of income inequality (see Chapter 2 for an in-depth description of Maple Valley). Emmy and her mother are the lowest income family in our study, living in a more working-class area close to Fairley where panhandling is more common. While differences in community wealth were brought up by multiple parents, a lack of homeless people living on the street- as will be discussed later in the chapter- was also often cited as a reason why parents did not discuss issues of poverty.

Finally, some families spoke about how to help others in the context of teaching their child how to budget his or her own money. Specifically, five out of the twenty-six parents reported using a version of the Spend/Save/Share model for budgeting with their children. Frannie described this approach the following way,

> We just started an allowance with her, so we've been talking a lot about ... She does it in the three cups format, so there's a book, actually, it's call Three Cups, it's basically you have one

> to save, one to spend, and one to share. And so the share is something ... She gets to choose whether it's buying food for the animals in the animal shelter, or donating to the Mission, or buying food ... Whatever it is, but somehow giving it to someone else.

Interestingly, this strategy came up when parents were asked how they spoke about money with their children and was employed by parents at every grade level (kindergarten n=1, 2nd n=2, 4th n=2).

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. When we looked at differences by political ideology and religious affiliation relatively few trends emerged. The exception to this was, rather intuitively, religion as a conversational spark was only mentioned by individuals who identified as religious (39%).

In terms of grade level differences, school as a conversational spark was brought up more often by parents of kindergarten and second graders (67% each) as opposed to 4th graders where school was brought up in only 38% of interviews. Descriptively, school donation drives were a spark for kindergarteners although their parents sometimes felt their child did not really understand the activity (e.g. "I know they've been part of a food bank at school, but I don't know that he completely gets that"- Nev). In contrast, 2nd and 4th grade parents also mentioned school drives and other children receiving school lunch as sparking conversation but did not seem to doubt their child's ability to understand the topic.

What and how do parents and children discuss topics related to economic hardship and poverty?

When we look at the major topics related to helping that came up, there was tremendous similarity between parent interviews and the parent-child discussion: community organizations, basic needs, and values and lessons. In this section, I will elaborate on each of these themes and then present the developmental trend that I saw across both streams of data.

The Role of Community Organizations in Helping Those in Need. In terms of what parents' report discussing with their children, not surprisingly – as one of the questions asked

specifically about community organizations and programs – the majority of parents (n=22) reported at least some discussion of community organizations with their children. These discussions mostly centered on what different types of community organizations were and who they served, as in this example with Megan, the mother of a 2nd grader.

> So for his birthday last year, instead of presents I recommended that instead of presents, we put out an invitation so that they bring canned goods. And that Benjamin and I would bring the gifts, the canned goods to the Mission, and so he's been to the haven a couple times. And he understands that that's for the Mission is a place where people that can live and get some food, support and financial support and things like that.

Some research suggests that such conversations are becoming more typical for children being reared today (Fidelity Charitable, 2014). For instance, in their survey of donors, Fidelity Charitable reported that 94% of donors were teaching their children to donate to charity (2014) and a nationally representative survey of Canadians suggest that 79% of parents have discussed charitable giving with their children (Imagine Canada, 2017).

These very matter of fact discussions of community organizations, particularly food banks, were also common in the parent-child discussion (n=16). The conversations mostly focused on the community organizations in the clips or similar organizations in Maple Valley, such as the Mission or the Collective. Here Amanda connects what she and kindergarten daughter Lucy have just seen in the video clip to their experience at the Mission.

> Amanda: Do you remember when we went on a tour of the Mission and they took us in the back and they showed us all the shelves? So, when we bring food in they put it on the shelf...
>
> Lucy: *shakes her head no*
>
> Amanda: You don't remember that? They did it one time you know when they take our food, and they weigh it, and they tell us how many pounds of food we gave. And then they took us in the back.

While Amanda elaborated on the trip, the exchange is characteristic of discussions of community organizations as it mostly focuses on what is done there (i.e. donating and collecting food).

Meeting Basic Needs. Building on the discussions of community organizations that address issues of hunger, discussions of basic needs were very common (n=21) in the parent interviews. For instance, when asked what was important for her son Wesley to know about how we can help individuals and families in need Nev responded,

> I think that he, at his age, should know that there are some people who are less fortunate than he is, or that others are, and that some people don't have basic needs being met and that we should, as a society, help to come together to make sure ... a society and community ... and make sure that those needs are being met within reason, that extra food can be handed off, I know they've been part of a food bank at school, but I don't know that he completely gets that, and to help when you're able to either financially or with any extra resources.

As was the case with the types of community organizations that were discussed, Nev's comments are representative because of their focus on food. This may reflect young children's focus on the more physical aspects of wealth and poverty (Chafel, 1997). Food is a concrete known possession that children can relate to, perhaps making it an easy entry point for conversations.

Similarly, I found discussions about what people need in the parent-child discussion (n=14). These discussions again focused on food as well as shelter and utilities, such as electricity and heating (n=14). Many of these discussions centered on labeling what needs people have (n=11), as Megan does here for her 2nd grade son Benjamin.

> There are some things you have to buy. You have to spend money on a lot of things. Bills, electricity, property tax, which is costing us $6,000 a year and your family. And electricity, water, gas, and car. These we have to buy.

Other dyads went beyond this, discussing what not having your basic needs met might be like (n=8). For instance, here Stacy scaffolds her 4th grade son Leo to think about the challenges of meeting your family's needs on a limited budget.

> Stacy: So, if they only had six hundred dollars left for four weeks, they have to buy groceries. Do you know how much groceries cost? How much do groceries cost to mommy?
>
> Leo: You always spend a hundred or two hundred dollars.

> Stacey: Right and there's only five of us and there's eight of them. So, if I spend, say I just spend a hundred dollars a week. That would be four hundred dollars. They'd only have two hundred dollars left for the month. They have to pay for gas, doctor's bills that might come up.
>
> Leo: They wouldn't survive.
>
> Stacey: Electricity, home insurance.
>
> Leo: How much does home insurance cost?
>
> Stacey: It's a lot. So, that's why she was getting a little teary, right? It's scary to think about that.

While not all of the conversations were this lengthy, parents and children who engaged in them thought through the physical and emotional consequences of what not having your needs met were as well as the tough choices that families might have to make.

Moral Values & Lessons Parents Try to Instill. Strikingly, when asked about community organizations or how to help individuals and families in need, 25 out of the 26 parents interviewed discussed values and lessons they tried to impart to their children while discussing how to help individuals and families in need.

Helping in Little Ways & Social Responsibility. As seen in Table 5, the values and lessons mentioned in parent interviews ranged from appreciation to empathy and perspective taking, although the largest single area, not surprisingly, was the necessity to help others and your community (n=19). Overall this took two primary forms: helping in little ways and social responsibility- that is contributing to your community or society as a whole. Out of the 19 interviews that mentioned helping as a value or lesson, 10 mentioned helping in little ways and 12 mentioned social responsibility, though these concepts were not mutually exclusive. For instance, Breanne mentioned the importance of discussing social justice with her daughter, Jenna. When prompted to give an example of a time she spoke about social justice Breanne said,

> Probably the most recent time would have been around Martin Luther King Day, when we were talking about the reasons behind the Poor People's Campaign, the reasons for things

> like lunch counter sit-ins and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, why white people in America were making concerted efforts to not let people of color succeed, for specific reasons. That none of this was by accident. And that we have a chance to help, as white people, by removing those barriers wherever we can.
>
> Interviewer: And what do you think is important for her to know at her age about what can be done to help individuals and families in need?
>
> Breanne: Well, I think framing it in terms of what she is capable of doing to help. That small actions count.

Similarly, 5 out of the 19 parents discussed the importance of both helping in little ways and social responsibility.

Helping, generally, came up in 23 out of the 26 parent-child discussions. Many of these discussions included comments that highlighted small ways of helping, such as helping a neighbor or friend (n=14). For instance, while watching the job loss video, Amanda comments to kindergarten daughter Lucy, "Do you think that was neat when the kids sold the lemonade and cupcakes to help?" to which Lucy gave a thumbs up. Social responsibility was less common in the parent-child discussion, with only three dyads bringing it up. Here, Tyler stresses the importance of social responsibility with 4th grade son James.

> You will be trying to find bigger things, more important things, when you grow up. You accumulate more and more abilities. The more capable you are, the more people you can help. And, sometimes, spending money, buying things, hiring others to do things for you is also a great way to help others. I'm not saying we spend a lot of money. We need to think about our pocket, how much money you have. But we need to try to think about others. If everybody covers a pocket and don't want to spend money, then other people will have no job. This is how the society runs. I will talk with you more in the future about this.

Throughout their interview, Tyler stressed the importance of fiscal responsibility. At the same time, we see that he wants James to understand that in accumulating wealth, it is important to think of others and give to others for the benefit of society as a whole.

Encouraging Empathy & Perspective Taking. Beyond the importance of helping and social responsibility, over a third of parents (n=9) emphasized the importance of developing empathy and perspective taking during their conversations. Below Amber explains the emphasis she

places on empathy building in the way she approaches conversations with her biological son Noah about the foster children in their family.

> Well I think he's learning firsthand to be compassionate, and to have empathy. I think learning empathy is important. And then I think acting on it, and I think he's seeing that. Even if he has a difficult time when some of the foster kids are not nice, or taking his things, or having temper tantrums. A lot of times they'll come up with toys, and then it's hard for my kids because they're jealous that the other kids have toys. And then we talk about, "Oh, he has to be without his mom. How do you think that makes him feel? Maybe the stuff animal helps him feel like he's closer to his mom." So I think learning that empathy and tolerance, and then trying to live that.

While about a third of parents discussed empathy and perspective taking in the parent-interview, this theme dominated the parent-child discussions (see Chapter 3 on Empathy.) 20 out of 26 dyads discussed what it would be like to be in the video family's shoes (e.g. "Have you ever thought about what it would be like if we didn't have enough food to put in our lunch?"- Johanna) and all 26 dyads emphasized similarities they saw between the family in the video and their own family (e.g. "Seven [years old]! Same as you."- Colin). 14 dyads spoke about their experiences with poverty and economic struggle, either through individuals or friends in their community (n=12) or in terms of their family (n=7). Here Breanne makes this connection clear to 2nd grade daughter Jenna.

> I bet some of your friends in school use [Food Stamps]. Right? It's not just for people in cities, not just for people who are different colors then us. Lots of white people use it too.

While Jenna had not explicitly said that she thought food assistance was only for people of color or people living in urban areas, Breanne proactively countered this stereotype that often exists in US culture (Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Bourdeau, 2019). In doing so she highlighted a personal connection Jenna had to food stamps that she may have been unaware of.

Other Values & Lessons. Other values and lessons that came up during conversations included appreciating what you have (n=6), the importance of being kind (n=6), and other lessons (e.g. treating people the same regardless of class; let's not judge; working hard; n=11; Table 5).

While mentioned by just under a fifth of the sample (n=5), some parents reported discussing structures within society that create inequality. For instance, Johanna spoke about how issues of race and gender play a role in her parenting:

> I mean I guess, yeah, it's like baby steps when they're little, but I guess I want him to just, you know, I try to do this with all my boys, but I think it starts really young, which is that I want them to be empathetic, especially because they're boys. Especially because of the world that we live in. And I think that I want them to know that they have an advantage that because they're white boys, and I want them to always be looking for ways that they can be there for someone else.

Interestingly, all five parents who brought it up did identify as liberal. Moderate/conservative parents were more likely to bring up the importance of being kind (33% compared to 17%).

Structural critiques like this came up in a number of places in the parent-child discussion data, however the most common place way it was discussed was in terms of the causes of poverty. 11 families spoke about the structural causes of poverty and economic hardship (see Chapter 5 for full discussion.) The majority of these dyads spoke about jobs not paying enough, such as Sean and his son Phillip.

> Sean: What do you think about that? The idea that you can have both Mom and Dad working and you don't have enough money to pay for the stuff you need?
>
> Phillip: Yeah.
>
> Sean: That doesn't sound very fair, does it?
>
> Phillip: I get that.
>
> Sean: You would think everybody that works hard should be able to pay for what they need.
>
> Phillip: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Such structural criticisms, based mostly on inequities in pay, may seem simple at first glance, but they match what we know about children's abilities to reason about wealth and poverty at this age (Leahy, 1983; Mistry, et al., 2016).

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. I examined differences in the content of what parents reported discussing (e.g. community organizations, basic needs, and values and lessons), by religious background, political orientation, and grade. While there were some small differences numerically by political ideology, liberals were slightly more likely to discuss community organizations (88% versus 66% moderate/conservatives) and emphasize empathy (41% versus 22% of moderate/conservatives), descriptively we found no differences between the groups. Additionally, as mentioned above, all references to structural critiques were made by liberal parents. Similarly, when I examined religious background, small sub-group differences appeared at times numerically[10], overall there were no differences between those with and without religious backgrounds and no descriptive differences at all. Grade level differences, however, were evident across both data sources in how parents and children spoke about helping together.

In the parent interviews, parents often made references to what their child could or could not understand in terms what guided their conversations about helping (n=11; Table 5). For example, although there were fewer discussions of community organizations in 4th grade (63%) as opposed to kindergarten or 2nd (89% each). Descriptively, this may have been because these discussions were mostly definitional, serving to ensure that children understood the organizations purpose. For example, Caty discusses her 2nd grade daughter Aimee's understanding of the Collective saying,

> Aimee's knowledge of the Collective is that it's for people who don't have enough money to buy them new at other stores, so we will make bags of old clothes that she doesn't need or something, and we'll bring it to the Collective and just drop it off.

[10] In terms of helping, parents who identified with a non-Christian religious background all mentioned helping versus 80% of non-Protestant Christians, 71% of non-religious individuals, and 50% of Protestants. In terms of Empathy, 60% of non-Protestant Christians mentioned empathy compared to 40% of parents with non-Christian religious backgrounds, 29% of non-religious parents, and 13% of Protestants. Again there were no descriptive differences in the conversations and when aggregated to religious versus non-religious there were no differences.

There were also developmental trends in terms of the values and lessons parents reported emphasizing. In regard to empathy and perspective taking (discussed in-depth in Chapter 3), it is interesting to note that during the parent interviews, this theme was significantly more important to parents with younger children. 55% of kindergarten and 67% of 2nd grade parents spoke about empathy or perspective taking, while none of the 4th grade parents brought this topic up. Helping in little ways was discussed less by parents of 4th graders (25%) than by kindergarten or 2nd (44% each), perhaps reflecting parents' feeling that their older children were more capable. Surprisingly, social responsibility was discussed more by kindergarten parents (66%) than by 2nd (22%) or 4th (38%).

While helping others came up in 23 of the 26 parent child discussions, descriptively discussions of helping varied tremendously by the grade of the child participant. Discussions with kindergarten-age children were briefer, more often focused on definitions, and parent-initiated/directed. For example, in the following excerpt, Frannie explains the food pantry as she and her kindergarten-aged daughter May watched the video clip on hunger saying,

> Frannie: Oh. She's going to cook at the food bank, which is where a place... that needs food, like where we dropped off near your old school.
>
> Frannie: (a few seconds later) That's a food bank, where they have enough food, and she's learning to cook there, and they also feed people who don't have enough food there.
>
> May: Ooh. Cool.

Such definitions from parents were common throughout parent-child discussions with kindergarten students. This is not to say, however, that all kindergarteners were passive conversational partners. For instance, Milo asked during the video, "But mommy… is there just one shelter in the world?" to which mother Jessica explained, "No, there are shelters in lots of places."

Definitions related to poverty and economic hardship came up throughout much of the parent-child data. As seen in Table 4, 18 of the 26 discussions included a definition related to

poverty or economic hardship. Of note, all of the kindergarten discussions included such definitions as compared with 55% of 2nd grade dyads and 50% of 4th grade dyads. Therefore, it seems throughout the parent-child discussions, as we see here, parents of kindergarteners spent more time defining concepts than did parents of older children.

Amongst 2nd graders, children tended to take a more active role in discussions with parents -- responding more often to parent prompts, for example, although parents still directed much of the conversation as they did kindergarten-age children. For instance, the exchange below is typical of the 2nd graders in the study, as the mother, Hildi, structures the discussion for Jude, although he actively comes up with solutions and engages in conversation.

Hildi: What if our family was in that situation? What would it look like if dad lost his job?

Jude: We would try to help.

Hildi: Because we have a big family too, don't we?

Jude: We have four, yeah.

Hildi: That's stressful.

Jude: But we have six people in our house, so we have just the amount of all the kids.

Hildi: It's a lot of work caring for a big family, isn't it?

Jude: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Six kids.

The above exchange also is representative of many of the conversations between parents and children, as the mother asks her son to imagine what would happen if their family faced similar challenges to those faced by families in the video clips. As seen in Table 4, 20 out of 26 dyads used this structure in their discussions (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth analysis of perspective taking in the parent-child discussions).

Finally, 4th grade children in the study tended to be the most engaged participants in the parent-child discussions and their deliberations were more nuanced. This is perhaps best

exemplified by the "What could we do?" theme. Half of 4th grade parent-child dyads (n=4) spoke about what they as individuals or a family could do and three dyads brought it up at multiple points in the discussion. The most extensive conversation took place between Molly and her mother, Esther, who had two different lengthy exchanges about how their family could help individuals in need. In both instances, Molly takes the lead in putting forward ideas and her mother responds and builds-off of them.

> Molly: Yeah, and I ... I think, yeah, I think that we should have about ... I think $20 of our grocery money should be going to buy nutritious stuff for our food pantry.
>
> Esther: We can do that. That'd be good. We can have a charity box, you remember when we used to do that? We'd put extra coins and stuff into it, anytime there's change, put into it as something extra too for a different thing?
>
> Molly: Mm-hmm (affirmative). We can look at charity goals for a charity, how much a charity would take ... this is how much money you donate to give some foreign, some foreign place a vital resource.
>
> Esther: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Like if they need water or food, or ... and we can do lots of research too. There's different things that might, you know, some places where they're trying to help with, hey, we're going to introduce certain types of seeds, help people become farmers by doing permaculture, kind of agricultural things that will help, and then they can, that way they can help themselves and then help their community or giving small loans to people who want to start a little business, and then they pay it back, and then the next person has a loan. There's all sorts of things you can do.

Overall, I found that grade levels variations in the parent data were mirrored in the conversations that parents and children had together in response to video clips about hunger and job loss. We saw that kindergarten children and their parents discussed helping mostly at the definitional level- focused on defining terms and understanding what was taking place. 4th graders alternatively took a more active role in discussions, suggesting ways they or their families could help individuals in need.

What families avoided talking about

Perhaps just as important as what families discussed, in this study I was able to document what aspects of helping and support families avoided. In fact, 17 out of the 26 parent interviews

included some mention of topics that they reported never or rarely discussing (Table 5). These topics came up mostly through the parent interviews, although where appropriate I will include examples from the parent-child interactions.

Benefits Receipt. Based on prior research (Quint, et al., 2018), we asked participants if they had received benefits or services from local charities. As seen in Table 5, 17 families said they did not receive benefits, 5 said they did but did not discuss this with their child, and 2 said they received benefits of some kind and did discuss them with their child.[11] For four of the parents who reported receiving benefits but not discussing it, the parents said it was because they received benefits such as Women Infants and Children (WIC) when their child was young and therefore it was not discussed. We had one mother in the sample, Fiona, who was currently experiencing economic difficulties and had received benefits in the recent past. When asked if there were any topics about money that she would be uncomfortable discussing with her daughter Emmy, Fiona replied,

> Fiona: Yeah. When the video came up and the lady was getting SNAP benefits and WIC, I think that would be hard for me to talk with Emmy about. We've taken those benefits before and it's not really something that she's aware of.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Fiona: That I'm comfortable talking with her about.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable explaining why you don't?
>
> Fiona: I just don't want her to worry.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Fiona: Yeah. I think that's really what it comes down to. You know, but to be perfectly honest, it's also that I don't really want her to tell her friends that we have had those benefits. That's like an embarrassment factor.

[11] Two families are not included here. For Stacey and Leo, we skipped over the question accidently. In the other case with Erica, Colin, and Frank, Erica shared that she received benefits as a child and how difficult this was for her. She discussed how important it was for her that her children understood that she had received benefits as a child but she then became so emotional that we had to pause and then forgot to ask if the family currently received benefits, though from our discussion it did not appear that they were.

Similarly, Frannie described the role of embarrassment when she discussed why she does not discuss her mother's use of Food Stamps (i.e. SNAP) with her daughter May.

> Frannie: don't know if we've ever talked ... Like, my mom had ... It was before, she's on disability now, or she's in social security now, but she was on disability prior to being on that, and she has a lot of the cards for WIC. Or, not WIC…
>
> Interviewer: Food stamps?
>
> Frannie: Yeah. It's in Virginia… it's for food stamps, essentially, but it's now a debit card. But I would never want May to understand that she has that. My mom also wouldn't want her to know that, she's very, very embarrassed by it, unfortunately. But I can understand, I just wish she didn't. It hurts to feel like she's had a hard time asking for that support. But, I don't think I would share that with May

While we certainly cannot generalize from the above mothers' statements, the desire to shield children from worry and the "embarrassment factor" aligns with the limited research that exists on why parents do not talk with their children about economic struggle (Quint, et al., 2018).

The two parents who reported discussing benefits with their children both were foster parents and the benefits that they received were for their foster children. The discussions both seem concrete, as Rachel describes below.

> We talked a little bit about WIC because actually, we use WIC because of just foster care I get WIC. So yeah, Alexandra actually looked at the grocery receipt the other day and said, "Oh, WIC gives us this."

Therefore, in our sample, the only families who spoke about their benefits receipt were those who did not financially qualify, but did so because of foster children in their care. While our sample is certainly not low-income and cannot be generalized to the experiences of individuals living in poverty, our data hint at benefits as an area where families purposely avoid conversations.

It is also interesting to note that of the parents who reported never receiving benefits (n=17), only one parent mentioned any kind of government support in response to the question "Many communities have programs and agencies that help families in need. Do you ever have conversations with your daughter/son about such programs in your community?" Breanne briefly

explained that 2nd grade daughter Jenna, "asked me once why some of the kids eat breakfast at school. And I said, 'Some of them just like to eat breakfast at school, and some of them live in families where the parents can't buy them breakfast.' " Beyond this, it seems that for these families government benefits were not a topic of conversation.

Discussions of benefits and government support occurred in just under a third of our parent-child dyads (n=7), though they were very brief and focused mostly on definitions. For example, Stacey explained WIC to her son Leo saying, "That's what WIC stands for. Women and Infants and Children." Therefore, even though just over a quarter of the sample mentioned government support, these discussions typically lacked depth.

Beyond Benefits. Benefits were not the only topic from which parents reported shying away. Parents also reported not discussing or rarely discussing the existence of poverty (n=2), how to help individuals or families in need (n=7), or the organizations and government programs within their community designed to help those in need (n=13). In describing why they do not discuss certain topics, parents overwhelmingly cited their child's ability to understand the topic. For instance, Caty described how she limited her discussions with her daughter Aimee saying,

> I don't have very detailed conversations with her about what we're doing. It just sort of, she knows what the Collective [local charity] is or the yellow bins, the Planet Aid bins that we drop things off into. We don't ... Meals on Wheels, things like that, that kind of stuff similar to what they were in the video is foreign to her. She doesn't know anything.

While some parents felt like their child was unprepared for such discussions, a few parents did indicate that in the future they planned to have more explicit conversations with their children, when they felt they were more equipped to handle them (e.g. "Hopefully as he is more capable, he will be interested, and we can encourage him to volunteer." -Hilary).

Another reason parents cited as for why they did not often have conversations about helping was the lack of conversational sparks in their lives (e.g. a lack of homeless people on the streets). In 6 out of the 26 interviews, parents mentioned how a lack of conversational spark limited their

discussion of helping in some way. For instance, in response to being asked what was important for her son Max to know about what can be done to help individuals and families in need, Angela explained

> Well I think you should just be more aware. I think at this point you should be more aware and that it's commonplace. So around here, it's not as apparent, we don't have homeless on the street and we don't get as exposed to it as much. So it doesn't bring up as many opportunities for discussion but I think being aware of the issues would be important and learning to have an open mind about them, about the issues.

Such comments suggest that at least some parents struggle to begin conversations on helping individuals and families in need. In informal conversation, one mother even asked me for recommendations on how to talk to her son about this and other topics related to poverty. I think this speaks to the gap not only in the academic literature but also in parenting resources. Motivated by this, in my discussion I will address resources for parents, particularly those in middle- and upper-class communities, for talking about poverty and economic hardship.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. I found few differences in what parents avoided by grade, religious background, or political ideology. The one exception to this was in the number of parents who reported rarely discussing community organizations and government organizations (n=13). These parents were more likely to be moderate/conservative (66% versus 35% of liberals) and non-religious (71% versus 31% of religious parents).

Discussion

The findings from this chapter highlight the many ways in which discussions of helping begin in the home environment and how they play out. While it appears that there are a variety of conversational sparks for families, they are often not taken up fully, and there are a number of topics which parents report rarely or never discussing. In this section, I summarize the findings for the chapter and suggest ways in which they might guide how adults think about discussions of helping with children in the elementary school years.

From the interviews and discussions, I learned that conversations about helping others are often sparked by participation in events such as donations drives at school, in places of worship, or in the community. This finding is important, as prior literature suggested that parents often failed to engage their children in philanthropic acts (Bjorhovde, 2002). Additionally, children's experience seeing others receive benefits- either through foster care, adoption, or free and reduced priced lunch at school- can serve as an impetus for conversation. However, I found that often these conversations lacked depth, both in terms of how parents spoke about them and when we observed the conversations through the parent-child discussion.

The variety of conversational sparks we documented are important, as they point to moments where parents, and other adults, may intervene to have discussions. For instance, given that donation drives were a common conversational spark, future work could help parents engage in more meaningful discussions about the organization that the drive is supporting or, more critically, why the community needs that organization in the first place. This is in line with the philanthropic studies literature that emphasizes the importance of conversations about giving including discussions of cause and effect (Bjorhovde, 2002). While such conversations would obviously vary by the age and interest of the child, our data suggest that there are prime moments in families' everyday lives to discuss helping individuals and families living in poverty.

In the parent interviews and parent-child discussions, I found that the content of family conversations about helping focused on basic needs, community organizations, and on instilling values, such as being empathic. When observed in person, discussions of helping others varied tremendously by the grade level of the child, with kindergarten discussions being parent-led and definitional and 4th grade discussions being more balanced in terms of initiation between parents and children. This developmental trend seems appropriate, given what we know about how children come to understand the concepts of wealth and poverty (see Mistry, Elenbaas, & Griffin, in

progress). In kindergarten, children are just beginning to be able to describe these concepts while by 4th grade they have a much more nuanced understanding of wealth and poverty (Sigelman, 2012). The research on children's conceptions of helping specifically is less established, although the literature that does exists supports this developmental trend (Enesco, et al., 1995; Mistry, et al., 2016). Our data suggest that parents are attuned to their child's developmental needs and reduce their scaffolding of conversations accordingly.

Finally, findings from the current study documented that there are a number of aspects of helping those living in poverty that parents rarely or never discussed. 17 of the 26 parents reported that conversations involving the causes of poverty, how to more specifically help individuals or families in need, or community organizations and programs were not regular topics of conversations for families, often because of their perception that their child cannot understand these topics or a lack of conversational spark (e.g. no visible homeless on the streets). Forms of government support were rarely discussed by families- either those who had received them or those who had not- and in the parent-child discussion the treatment of government benefits was brief and definitional.

The lack of conversation around government benefits may be particularly important. As stated in the methods chapter, the participants in the current study were mostly middle class. Of those families who had received government support, only 2 reported discussing them with children- and those two only qualified because of foster children in their care. Of the 17 families who did not report receiving benefits, only one mentioned government support in their parent-child discussion. Taken together, these data suggest that children are not often exposed to ideas about government support in the home environment. While some children in the study noticed their peers receiving free and reduced priced lunch, but it seems a more thorough discussion of forms of structural support is mostly absent from home.

The conversations about helping that I documented focus mostly on charity as a form of helping. Indeed, philanthropy studies suggests that charity is something that parents think is important to discuss with children (Bjorhovde, 2002; Imagine Canada, 2017). One potential problem with this, however, in combination with the lack of discussion of structural forms of help, is that children's understanding of ameliorating economic struggle is only focused on individual acts. This potentially encourages children to think about economic position as a result of individualistic, rather than structural, causes. In the next chapter, we will examine how parents spoke about the causes of economic difference specifically and if they went beyond the individualistic tone that characterized family discussions of helping those living in poverty.

Chapter 5:
"Why do you think their dream fell apart?"
Parent-child discussions about the causes of economic hardship and economic difference

Amanda: There are a couple of families that are known in the elementary school that are really struggling, and the kids are in need of basic winter clothing, donations for Christmas gifts, and so we talk about these children and just… let Lucy know that not all families have a mom and a dad who make enough money to cover expenses, and some families need extra help. Lucy is familiar with the little sister in one of these families and why it's important that we look at her clothes and what we can share with this little girl, or if I'm buying snow pants for Lucy, let's just pick up an extra pair for this other little girl. I don't think she's put the pieces together… these concepts are so big and complicated that at five...

Interviewer: What do you think that at her age is important for her to know about why families have different amounts of money?

Amanda: That it exists, period. She's not going to understand being laid off or not having an education, so you've gotta fry burgers for $10 an hour. She just needs to know that there are some families that just don't have the resources. At Christmas time, we sponsored a couple of kids in need. I took her to the store with me to buy gifts… She didn't really get it because she's like, "Okay, so we got the stuff on their list, now what about me?" … but I think through repeated exposure, seeing the kids at The Mission when we go there, volunteering, just getting out and about and seeing different families and different lives outside of our immediate town will help broaden her horizons.

Fiona: [Emmy] has a friend who lives in our neighborhood, but they have their own home. It's a two-parent household. They have a backyard, and a swing set, and a much bigger home than we do. She's like, why don't we have a big house like that, it's so nice. Like, why don't we have one of those? So I've had to kind of explain, her family is a little different because they have two earners. So I think they probably have some more money than we do, so they can afford a bigger house than we can. I guess that's an example of when we've talked about-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Fiona: ... talked about it. I just try to be fairly matter of fact.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). How comfortable did you feel when you were having that discussion with her?

Fiona: Not very.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Fiona: No, it's definitely hard because she doesn't get that stuff that I was saying that I wish she did. You know, like about the emotional part of it. I guess, it doesn't seem like it's that emotional for her. For me it is.

The two mothers above are responding to the question "Can you tell me about a time when you've spoken with your child about why families have different amounts of money?" These responses embody many of the themes that came up in our data: conversations come up in the context of comparing their family to others; parents giving different types of attributions for economic difference that are not all easily classifiable; and discussing their children's limited understanding of the topic. In this chapter I explore how parents like Amanda and Fiona talk about economic difference with their young children and contextualize their responses with what we observed in the parent-child discussions.

Literature Review

As stated in the literature review (see Chapter 1), the early elementary school years are an important time for learning about causal attributions for wealth and poverty (Leahy, 1983, Sigelman, 2012). Traditionally, in both the adult and child literatures, attributions for wealth and poverty have been broken down into three major categories: Individualistic (e.g. hard work; ability), Structural (e.g. structural inequalities, differences in pay); and Fatalistic (e.g. luck, God's will; Leahy 1983; Sigelman, 2012). Overall, the literature suggests that prior to age six children struggle to provide attributions for wealth and poverty (Leahy, 1983; Ramsey, 1991). During middle childhood (7-11 years old) children are more readily able to discuss causes of wealth and poverty (Bonn & Webley, 2000; Camfield, 2010; Enesco et al., 1995; Harrah & Friedman, 1990; Leiser et al., 1990; Sigelman, 2012, 2013), with younger children emphasizing more individualistic reasons (e.g. ability and effort; Leahy, 1983; Enesco, et al., 1995; Sigelman, 2012) and older children including a mix of individualistic, fatalistic, and structural causes (e.g. unequal pay; Enesco, et al., 1995; Sigelman, 2012).

We know less, however, about what influences the development of children's beliefs about the causes of wealth and poverty

Family Socialization about the Causes of Wealth & Poverty.

As reviewed earlier, we know very little about how parents and children speak about the causes of wealth and poverty (see literature review in Chapter 1). What we do know mostly comes from the qualitative literature on how parents living in poverty speak to their children (see Quint, et al., 2018 for review) and the family finance literature (Romo, 2011; 2014). For instance, from both of these literatures we know that parents have rules about what they will and will not share with their children in terms of their own economic circumstances (Gudmunson & Danes, 2011; Romo, 2011; 2014). One study done with low-income mothers suggests that they are less likely to share information with their younger children on economic struggle than with older children (McLoyd & Wilson, 1992). Other research has found that parents often cite avoiding child worry as the reason they avoid discussions of economic struggle with their children (Acker et al., 2001; Mistry, Lowe, Benner, & Chien, 2008; Romo, 2011).

While the research suggests that families who are struggling economically shy away from discussions of economic hardship with their children, we do not know how middle class and upper-class families talk about economic hardship or its causes. We also do not know how parents talk about why families outside of their own have different amounts of money. Therefore, in this chapter I hope to examine how middle-class parents discuss issues of economic difference with their children.

Research Question

Given the lacuna in the literature, the aim of this chapter is to address the following questions:

1. How do parents and children talk about why families have different amounts of money?
2. Are there any differences in this based on the grade level of the child, political ideology, and the religious background?

Methods

To address the questions in this chapter, data come from both the parent interview and the parent-child discussion (see Methods in Chapter 2 for full details on interviews, participants, and coding procedures). Specifically, in this chapter I draw on responses to the question: "Can you tell me about a time when you've spoken with her about why families have different amounts of money?" (see Table 6 for themes). Additionally, I use parent-child data to highlight how themes and developmental trends played out in observed conversations between parents and their children.

Results

What sparks conversations about economic difference?

Parents were in agreement that conversations about the causes of economic difference generally came up when their children were comparing themselves to others; mostly peers and other family members, as happened with Amanda and Fiona. Parents spoke about their children noticing others who had less than they did (n=11). For example, in her response, Hillary spoke about the multiple ways it comes up in her conversations with 4th grade son Teddy and his siblings.

> They've talked about why does so and so live with their grandmother, or ... We've talked about children who might be being abused and had to be taken away from their parents and are now living with a grandparent or a foster family. We've talked about parents who are on

> drugs and have had their children taken away. So yeah, they know that a lot of their classmates might have very difficult home lives.

It is clear here that less fortunate families in their community are the impetus for family conversations about economic difference.

Alternatively, other parents (n=8), spoke about their children noticing when others had more than they did. In the quote at the start of the chapter, Fiona describes how hard these kinds of observations are for her in that she and daughter Emmy are struggling economically. In most cases in our sample, however, children noticed what may seem like relatively small differences to an outsider. For example, Johanna explains a conversation she had with her kindergarten son Felix who felt left out amongst his wealthier peers.

> And he did say to me, which is I feel like a status thing around here, he said …Why don't I have one of those tags on my coat, like a lot of other kids at those tags and I want one of those. So that's a lift ticket for skiing, which we've never done. But I would say, you know, if you want to try skiing, we could try to go and try it sometime when it's like a budget thing, but we're not going to sign up for skiing lessons and do that every week because it's expensive and I don't even know if he'd like it, you know. But I feel like around here that's like a thing. It's like, "Oh, everybody has their lift ticket on their coat."

As seen in Table 2, Felix and his family are very much middle class, making between $75,000 and $99,999 annually. However, this concrete difference in possessions is important to Felix, as it was to Emmy, and he wants to understand why he cannot be just like everyone else. Such exchanges remind us of the importance and salience of possessions to young children (Leahy 1981; Sigelman, 2012) and how they can serve as an entry point for conversations about wealth differences across the economic spectrum.

Beyond comparing their families to others, parents in our sample discussed other conversational sparks including community wealth (n=4), the child wanting something (n=3), and

charitable giving (n=2). For example, in the following excerpt, mother Emily explains the role of community wealth in her conversations with 4th grade daughter, Ruby.

> The area that we live in is a somewhat affluent area, and I think we're probably closer to the bottom of the ladder in our tiny little niche community. But that I have tried to instill in her that we're pretty middle of the road in terms of the larger country.

Emily's comments are particularly important when we think about challenges parents might face in having conversations about economic difference. In other chapters, we have seen that parents cite a lack of conversational spark as a limiting factor in their conversations about economic struggle. While a lack of conversational spark did not come up specifically in these data (see Table 6), what we can say is that parents certainly were informed by the wealth in their communities. As children in the US live in increasingly economically segregated neighborhoods (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011), this would suggest fewer and fewer natural triggers for conversations.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. In terms of differences in conversational sparks, quantitatively, we saw that liberal parents (52%) were more likely to mention others having less or having it worse than were moderate/conservative parents (22%). Descriptively, however, while parents at every grade level focused on other children their child knew (e.g. school peers, friends) who struggled financially, three parents spoke about people in other countries having a harder time than them. These parents had children in older grades (2nd and 4th), were all liberal, and all had a religious affiliation. Here April describes how international adoption sparks a conversation between she and her son Dan about resources.

> I mean one thing with the money that he knows …[Dan]'s adopted, international adoption, he's from Romania. So he knows that he has a big thing with birth mom and why birth mom, why he's not, why he was adopted, why as he says, "His mom ditched him." We always say, "Well you know in some places," and oftentimes we refer to his Romania because that's a very personal connection to him… Resources aren't there. They're not available.... It's you know the luck of where we are. Some people, some sort of it's not necessarily the

> choices that you make but sometimes the situations you find or the environment that you're brought into.

Like the more common connections to children in their community, April and Dan still speak on a very personal level, as did another parent who spoke about international wealth inequality. However, all three of these international conversations hint at how some parents are widening the scope of what their children are thinking about when it comes to wealth and poverty. There were no other descriptive or quantitative differences in conversational sparks.

Attributions for Economic Difference.

From our interviews with parents, we found that the majority of parents (n=20) gave some attribution for the cause of wealth and poverty when speaking with their child. In fact, almost half of the parents in our sample gave more than one attribution (e.g. fatalistic and structural; n=12). In the parent-child data, again we saw that the majority of dyads (n=15) gave some sort of classifiable attribution for the causes of economic struggle or economic differences between people. In the following section I will examine how parents report speaking about the three major types of attributions for economic difference: structural, individualistic, and fatalistic (Leahy, 1983) as well as attributions for economic difference that could not be classified. I also document what these types of attributions looked like when parents and children discussed the causes of economic struggle during the parent-child discussion. Finally, I examine the differences we saw in the data by grade, political ideology, and religious background.

Individualistic. Individualistic attributions for the causes of wealth and poverty are the most common type of attribution for wealth or poverty that young children make (Chafel, 1997). In the parent interview data individualistic explanations to children were most often cited, with 12 out of the 20 parents who mentioned attributions making an individualistic attribution. Within those

attributions, the main examples given by parents revolved around wealth differences being the result of choices you make (n=6) and how much effort one puts into education (n= 5).[12]

When parents spoke about choices, they often spoke about them as an important reason for wealth differences, but not the only one. As I mentioned in the introduction to this section, many parents (n=12) would express multiple types of attributions at the same time. For instance, here Rachel explains how she speaks about differences in wealth with 4th grader Alexandra.

> [I]f we do talk about it at all, it's in terms of what they might want to do some day and so that it is important to me that if there are certain kinds of jobs that you can't actually make a living at. So those aren't the ones you want to choose if you have a choice. I mean, there are some people who don't have much of a choice. You can come from a place like this and then you would have the education that they're going to have, you can choose to do a lot of things and you can choose not to… The way it comes up is we have this friend who didn't go to college. He's trying to make it as an actor, but he kind of couch surfs… So those kinds of specific situations are what basically come up and sort of, what that might mean to them and then choices for college.

As you can see, Rachel first clarifies that there are situations in which individuals don't have choices. However, the content of her explanation to Alexandra and her sisters is almost exclusively focused on an individual's ability to chart their own destiny based on educational choices.

Similarly, we found a number of parents who spoke about hard work in relation to education (n=5). For instance, here Hilary explains how she talks to Teddy, her 4th grade son, about hard work.

> Well, I want him to know that there are always extenuating circumstances where parents lose jobs, somebody gets sick and can't work, but generally that hard work pays off, that if you work hard in school, you study, you do your best, you will succeed. You can have a job. If they go to college, that would be wonderful, but we don't necessarily expect them to go to college, and we don't think that that will be ... We don't think that that is the only path to happiness.

[12] The other individualistic attribution was just about hard work- not related to school.

Like with Rachel, Hilary begins with the caveat that this does not apply to everyone. Clearly Hilary and Rachel both feel that there are situations in which hard work does not pay off. However, with their own children they emphasize individual effort. It is interesting to consider how such messaging impacts children's beliefs about the causes of wealth and poverty.

While individualistic causes of economic difference were the most common attribution in the parent interviews, they were rare in the causes of economic struggle that parents and children discussed together in response to the video clips. It came up twice when talking about job loss as a cause of poverty and once for a reason for poverty besides job loss. Of these three occurrences, two were in fact children who made an individualistic attribution, which their parents then went on to correct, as we see here in an exchange between son James and father Tyler as they discuss if the father who lost his job in the video can get another one.

> James: If the first job they got ... they didn't ... they lost their job because for example they were too lazy. If they find the next job, they could not be that lazy and not lose their job.
>
> Tyler: Pretty complicated. Sometimes people lose job and not because of they're lazy. There can be a lot of reasons. Maybe the company doesn't have enough money, so they have to lay off their employees. The company needs to survive. They cannot hire so many people, so they will have to let people go.

Tyler acknowledges that the causes of job loss are complicated, and while his comments suggest that some people may lose their job because they are lazy, he highlights other reasons for James, which he may not have thought of.

Individualistic attributions did come up when parents and children spoke about the ways they or others could avoid or get out of economic trouble (n= 7). For instance, here Megan and 2nd grade son Benjamin talk about Patricia, Jafir's mom, and her choice to return to school.

> Megan: So what do you think the problem was with the family?

Benjamin: That the dad, he didn't get enough money from the barber shop, so the mom had to go to cooking school.

Megan: What did you think about that choice?

Benjamin: That was a good choice.

Megan: Yeah.

Benjamin: Because she probably got enough money to pay for the family.

Megan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Much like some of the other individualistic attributions we have seen, this conversation focuses on the choices that families make. Such discussions mirror the trend towards individualistic attributions that we say in the parent data. Parents and children were unlikely to talk about individualistic causes in terms of why the families in the video were struggling (e.g. lack of effort) but when they thought about how the families could get out of poverty individualistic attributions were common.

In all of these cases we see that parents, while making individualistic attributions for economic difference, aren't completely comfortable with this classification. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that we also saw a large number of structural explanations for economic difference, as I will discuss in the next section.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. I found no differences individualistic attributions in the parent interview nor parent-child discussion by political ideology or religious background. The exception to this was that non-religious parents made more individualistic attributions (74%) compared to those parents with a religious background (41%)[13]; although there were no descriptive differences between the groups. As we will see with the other types of attributions, I saw a slight increase at each grade level in individualistic attributions made in

[13] In terms of the breakdown of religious backgrounds, non-Protestant Christians had the fewest (20%), then Protestants (37%), and then non-Christian religious parents (60%).

the parent interviews (k= 3, 2nd= 4; 4th= 5). However, there were no descriptive differences however between grade levels.

Structural attributions. Structural attributions for wealth, poverty, or economic inequality are those where a social structure outside the individual is causing the difference (e.g. inequitable pay, racism, sexism, discrimination; Leahy, 1983). Perhaps not surprisingly, young children (i.e. kindergarten aged) are not often able to make such attributions (Leahy, 1983), however by 2nd and 4th grades, children are more likely to move beyond individualistic attributions and can begin to discuss relatively simple structural causes of wealth (e.g. differences in pay; Chafel, 1997). Structural explanation of economic difference to children were common in our parent data, with 10 out of 26 parents mentioning them.

The most common way that parents spoke about structural causes of economic difference was that different jobs paid different amounts of money (n=5). For example, Johanna explains a discussion she recently had with her kindergarten son Felix.

> Actually yeah, we just talked about that the other day because he was talking about how when he grew up, he wanted to have a job that made a lot of money. And so I was explaining what I think. I mean I have a master's degree in religious ethics, which is, I always joke about that I went into that for the money, but it's like, I do think it's pretty random that how much money goes to which profession? Like I was telling him, "Well, if you went into banking you'd probably do pretty well with money. Even if you're just, you're helping other people move their money around, or you could be a lawyer or a doctor. Those are all things that make a lot of money." But, you know, I kind of explained that there's a variety of amounts of money you can make depending on what you're doing and it's not necessarily based on how hard you're working, you know. Like for example, I always tell them "I'm working super hard around here and I'm getting nothing."

Like many parents, Johanna emphasizes that the amount of money different jobs make does not necessarily reflect the effort that goes into them. This stands in stark contrast to the messages sent by parents who spoke about individualistic attributions who often emphasized the importance of hard work, as described in the previous section.

The other common structural theme were social issues, particularly racism and sexism, which were mentioned by three parents. For example, here Xenia explains how despite living in a predominantly white community, she tries to address the issue of race with her sons.

> Xenia: They know, I do talk to them, even though it's not really relevant in our community because everybody's white practically, but they know a lot about racial disparity, injustice and how things are not always fair.
>
> Interviewer: And does that just come up or did you do specifically try to talk about that with them.
>
> Xenia: Well, they're really big baseball fans, so there's like lots of ... we've read lots about ... I'm forgetting his name because it's really the rest of my family's all baseball fans. The first black, the guy who played on the Dodgers. Jackie Robinson. Yeah. So, they've read stories about Jackie Robinson and we've read Martin Luther King stuff. So, I would say it comes up, but we probably make a point of letting them know.

Interestingly, Xenia speaks about using children's literature as an entry point for discussions about race, something that educators and researchers often do with children (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007; Mistry, et al., 2015). Another mother, Breanne, spoke about racism but went a step beyond Xenia's discussion and spoke about how she emphasizes taking action with her 2nd grade daughter Jenna.

> Breanne: We have talked in terms of racism and sexism, that not all jobs are practically open to all people, and not all people get paid the same for the same work, and how it's not legal, but it still happens.
>
> Interviewer: And how comfortable are you having those conversations with her?
>
> Breanne: Oh, I'm very comfortable having those conversations with her…. I think it's really important to talk about social justice.
>
> Interviewer: That makes sense. And are those things that you initiate or is that something that she'll bring up a topic and it comes up?
>
> Breanne: I think that I have initiated it more, but sometimes she will ask me questions or make comments related to what she's learned.
>
> Interviewer: And what do you think is important for a child to know at her age about why families have different amounts of money?

> Breanne: Oh, I think that the socio-economic forces are really important to mention, that the reasons why people don't have enough money aren't always fair or right, and that we have an obligation to help change those conditions. I've never really talked to her about the relationship between how much school you can go to and how much money you can make later. We haven't really talked about that. But more like how inequality tends to reinforce inequality, and it's hard to get out of. We talk more about that.

Breanne's emphasis on action and changing systemic conditions might be surprising to some, who might consider such structural conversations too much for young children. However, there is a growing body of evidence that children Jenna's age can understand structural attributions (Mistry et al., in progress) and that even young children are inclined to advocate for changing situations that they deem unfair (Elenbaas, 2019). The comments of both of these mothers reflect the sophisticated conversations that can take place with children.

Unlike the findings for individualistic attributions, I found a number of parent-child dyads cited structural attributions for economic struggle when they discussed the video clips together. 8 dyads discussed structural attributions in regard to job loss; 7 dyads spoke about structural causes of economic struggle other than job loss; and 1 dyad spoke about structural attributions in terms of avoiding economic hardship. [14] For example, here Sean tells Philip about his grandfather's own experience of job loss.

> Sean: So you know your grandpa had a big, long period of time where he didn't have a job… He lost his job and it was a few years before he found another one.
>
> Philip: What did he do to lose his job?
>
> Sean: That's when he was in the oil business and the oil business went bad so a bunch of companies disappeared. So that's, most of the time, why people lose their job, because it's not their fault. Didn't have anything to do with something they did. Their company runs out of money and they can't pay them anymore so they have to find something else.

[14] Relatedly, 7 dyads spoke about government support (e.g. WIC, SNAP) although these were mostly definitional and not attributions per se.

2nd grader Philip clearly is thinking in individualistic terms in the way he frames his question (i.e. "what did *he do*…?" However, Sean gently pushes back on this idea, emphasizing the role that companies play in job loss. Such reframing may help children like Philip who are just at the beginning of being able to make structural attributions.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. While I found no differences by religious background in parent interviews nor parent-child discussions, there were differences in structural attributions by grade and political ideology. Parents with children in older grades reported more structural attributions in their parent interview (k= 2, 2nd = 4; 4th = 4) and in the parent-child discussions (k=1, 2nd= 4, 4th= 5). Descriptively, I also found grade differences with parents of older children reporting more varied types of structural attributions. For example, Tyler shared how he talks to his 4th grade son James about how technology has taken jobs from people.

> Also, technology killed a lot of jobs. That also created World War I, World War II, part of the reasons that life is not always so easy. So even when we are enjoying life, we shouldn't forget there are many people are struggling in the world. And even ourself some day, may have difficult time. So be prepared for everything.

This type of structural attribution is more nuanced than the structural attribution of different jobs pay different amounts of money- which was the only type seen in kindergarten. Interestingly, 3 out of the 4 2nd grade parents who gave structural attributions focused on social issues like racism and sexism, something that was not seen in kindergarten or 4th grade.

In terms of political ideology, not surprisingly, we saw more structural attributions made by liberal parents (47%) than by moderate/conservative parents (22%). This was not the case in the parent child data where there were no differences. Descriptively, however, the structural attributions made by liberals and moderates/conservatives were not different.

Fatalistic Attributions. Fatalistic attributions for the causes of wealth difference were the least common attribution mentioned by parents in the interview (n=6) and only came up once in the parent-child discussions. When parents gave fatalistic attributions in their interviews it was primarily in the form of luck (n=3) or sickness (n=2). For example, Angela made multiple fatalistic attributions when she described how she speaks with her 2nd grade son Max about why families have different amounts of money.

> Angela: The kids know stories of kids whose houses burned down, or where they lost their jobs … Yeah, we focus on times like that. Sometimes, I think I probably told him about if someone got really sick, but those are probably the easiest to understand examples and then why people might have money or be going through a difficult time. We talk about education and trying to continue with education and how that can help you to have a better job. I suppose we've talked about that, we haven't gone too much more in depth, but we talked about ... we've hinted that that does help getting a job, sticking with school.
>
> Interviewer: In general, how comfortable do you feel having those kind of conversations with Max?
>
> Angela: Yeah, fairly comfortable. He asks good questions but he'll get on these tangents and distracted so it's hard to stay on the topic, I think.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think is it important for Max to know at his age about why families have different amounts of money?
>
> Angela: Well I think it's not necessarily the person's fault. It could be things that have happened to them, being unlucky, things have happened. And that it's important for others to not make any assumptions and just really to think about how you can help that person. I thought that last video was good, showing how the community supported them until they got back on their feet. So I think the importance of community, and thinking about others beyond yourself. I find that it's hard in our day to day lives to really ... Again, we get so consumed with this skiing and with this stuff we do, that it's important to think of others and again, not make any assumptions about what happened to that person and why they're there where they are at that time.

Like many of the parents (n=12), Angela made multiple types of attributions. She also emphasized that it was not always a person's fault when they are not doing well financially. However, time and time again she comes back to fatalistic attributions (i.e. luck, illness, fire) for why families may be struggling. While she ends her response talking about the importance of supporting and helping,

such fatalistic attribution may lead to a very individualistic form of helping (i.e. charity) as opposed to a more structural form (i.e. political action)- something which we saw in Chapter 4 and I will return to in the discussion.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. In terms of grade level differences, parent interview data showed a slight increase in fatalistic attributions by grade level (k=1, 2nd=2, 4th=3). Descriptively, however, there were no differences in either source of data by grade level. Additionally, we saw no differences in parent interview nor parent-child discussion data by political ideology.

Interestingly, all but one fatalistic attribution was made by religious parents. Since none of these parents referred to their faith or a higher power when responding it is hard to say why this is. However, future research might look into if religiously minded individuals tend to socialize their children to more fatalistic views of wealth, poverty, and economic inequality.

Non-classifiable attributions. While not a part of the traditional classification scheme of attributions (Leahy, 1983), attributions for the causes of economic difference that are unclear (e.g. he lost his job) are important to note, as they may have important implications for how children begin to develop their ideas about why people have different amounts of money. In our parent data, non-classifiable attributions happened in just less than a third of interviews that included an attribution (n=7).

Amanda, whose response started the chapter, provides a good example of this type of unclear explanation for why families have different amounts of money. She says that she lets "Lucy know that not all families have a mom and a dad who make enough money to cover expenses, and some families need extra help." She goes on to explain that she doesn't think Lucy could

understand other kinds of explanations for economic difference such as, "being laid off or not having an education, so you've gotta fry burgers for $10 an hour." Amanda thinks that Lucy, "just needs to know that there are some families that just don't have the resources." Research does suggest that young children of similar age to Lucy (i.e., ages 5 and 6) do not often make structural attributions for economic difference (Chafel, 1997). However, in a year or two she will be able to and we do not yet know if hearing attributions now (e.g. because their jobs don't pay enough, because they didn't go to good schools) might help the development of a diverse array of attributions for the causes of economic difference.

While non-classifiable responses were present in the parent data, they were very common (n=17) in the parent-child discussions. The majority of these related to dyads who spoke about job loss but did not specify why someone would lose a job (n=16). Beyond unclear reasons for job loss, families also spoke about family structure, such as the size of families (n=7) and having a single-parent family as the head of the family as reasons for economic struggle (n=2). For instance, here Caty and 2nd grade daughter Aimee talk about why the Valentine family are struggling.

> Caty: Why do you think their dream fell apart?
>
> Aimee: Because he lost his job.
>
> Caty: Yeah. He was the one making all the money for the whole family, right? How many of them?
>
> Aimee: Eight.

As you can see from this exchange, Caty and Aimee do bring up two reasons why the family is struggling: job loss and family size. However, neither Caty nor Aimee speak about why the father in the family lost his job. As we have seen in other chapters, children do not necessarily understand job loss and sometimes blame individuals. For instance, recall Stacey and Leo's discussion of job loss from Chapter 3.

Stacey: What if dad came home and said, "I lost my job today." What would you think?

Leo: I would be mad at him.

Stacey: Why?

Leo: Cause. He might not be good at working.

Stacey: You think maybe he might have done something wrong?

Leo: Yeah.

Stacey: It sounds like this person didn't do anything wrong. Just where he worked had to cut people back because maybe they needed to save money.

Leo: Oh.

Stacey: So, it doesn't sound like he did anything wrong.

This exchange between Leo and Stacy give us a window into the assumptions and ideas that may be going unchecked in the 16 dyads who had non-classifiable attributions about job loss. Like Leo, perhaps Aimee walked away from her discussion with her mother thinking that Mr. Valentin, the father in the videos, was at fault for losing his job. Developmental Intergroup Theory, as discussed in Chapter 1, would predict that the lack of explicit conversations, as we see here, would in fact lead children to make more stereotypical attributions about job loss (Bigler & Liben, 2006). It is therefore important to consider the unintended consequences of these types of conversations on children's burgeoning understanding of economic differences.

Differences by religion, political ideology, and grade. There were no group differences in the parent interview data. While we saw a numeric difference in the rates of non-classifiable attributions between religious (70%) and non-religious (42%) dyads in the parent-child discussions, there were not descriptive differences between the groups. There were no other differences in parent-child data by group.

What do families avoid discussing?

Over half the parents in our study (n=16) spoke about topics related to economic inequality that they rarely or never discussed with their children. The majority of these parents (n=10) spoke about just not talking to their children about why families had different amounts of money. When asked, parents often explained the topic hadn't come up, as Nev does here.

> Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time, or has there been a time, when you've talked with Wes about why families have different amounts of money?
>
> Nev: Not that I can recall.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. And why not?
>
> Nev: I just think it hasn't come up… I would be certainly be happy to say "Some jobs give more money. Some fields of study or careers offer more money." And also, I think, to that, some families have more expenses. It's all what comes in and what goes out. But, that just hasn't been a topic of conversation.

To understand this response, it is important to note that the majority of parents who reported never or rarely discussing why families have different amounts of money had children in kindergarten (n=5) compared to 3 in 2nd and 2 in 4th.[15] Similarly, we found of the parents who cited their child's level of understanding as a guiding factor in their discussions, (see Table 6) the majority were parents of kindergarteners, and the rest were parents of 2nd graders. For example, both Amanda and Fiona, whose daughters are in kindergarten and 2nd grade respectively, spoke about aspects of economic difference they did not think their children could understand.

> Amanda: [Lucy's] not going to understand being laid off or not having an education, so you've gotta fry burgers for $10 an hour. She just needs to know that there are some families that just don't have the resources

[15] There were no other significant group differences for what topics parents reported avoiding. When religious background was broken down into subgroups, non-Protestant Christians were more likely to report avoiding conversations compared to other groups (80% versus 50% of Protestants, 57% of non-Christian religious parents, and 57% of non-religious parents); but when compared in larger groups there were no differences (57% of non-religious parents versus 57% of religious parents).

> Fiona: [Talking about why families have different amounts of money is] definitely hard because [Emmy] doesn't get that stuff that I was saying that I wish she did. You know, like about the emotional part of it. I guess, it doesn't seem like it's that emotional for her. For me it is.

Research suggests that kindergarten aged children have trouble producing attributions for poverty (Leahy 1983; Sigelman 2012) and therefore comments such as the three mothers' above make sense; developmentally, it is likely kindergarten children do not bring up questions of *why* when it comes to differences in income.

At the same time that some parents were reporting avoiding certain topics, others discussed topics that they were simply waiting to discuss in the future with their children (n=5). Out of these four discussed wanting to speak with their children about structural inequalities when they are older. A powerful example of this comes from Fiona, when she talks about what she thinks is important for Emmy to understand about why families have different amounts of money.

> Fiona: I would like for her to understand that, but maybe it's not age appropriate. I don't know, I don't feel ... I think it's a really complex issue. I mean, it's sort of hard for me to wrap my head around why people have different amounts of wealth. But I think it's important to start talking about that. Start talking about reasons that that's true that are fair and reasons that I don't think are fair.
>
> Interviewer: Could you give me some examples?
>
> Fiona: ...I think it's not fair that there are people in this country who make tons and tons of money and don't give back to the people who work for them in their companies and don't pay them enough to even survive when they're making so much...
>
> Interviewer: ...Why haven't you talked about this? Do you have any idea why you haven't?
>
> Fiona: Well, I don't know that she's all that interested in it. When I teach her about things, I sort of let her drive the conversation and ask me. I don't think she's all that interested in wealth and all of that at this point.

Like Nev and the parents who reported avoiding certain topics, Fiona reports taking her lead from Emmy and says the topic does not come up. Fiona is waiting until her daughter seems more interested in discussions of wealth to talk about structural reasons for economic disparities. Perhaps

then it is important for researchers and educators to talk to parents about when their children (on average) are starting to think about these issues and reason about basic structural attributions- like pay differences. Such conversations and information may help parents to enter conversations that could shape their child's developing beliefs.

Discussion

In this chapter, I examined how parents and their elementary school aged children talk about the causes of economic difference together. The results suggest that discussions of economic difference often come up when children notice others who have more or less than they do. The attributions that parents reported giving for economic difference were diverse, including the three major types (e.g. structural, fatalistic, individualistic) and almost half of the parent sample mentioned more than one type of attribution in their interview. In the parent interviews, individualistic and structural attributions were most common and were also well-represented in our parent-child discussions. Fatalistic attributions were less common in parent interviews and parent-child discussions. These results are positive, in that parents seem to be giving children a variety of explanations for economic difference.

Strikingly, however, non-classifiable or unclear attributions were the most common form of attributions in the parent-child discussion data. Additionally, ten of the parents in our sample reported rarely or never discussing economic difference with their child. These findings are of particular importance, given the emphasis that Developmental Intergroup Theory (DIT, see Chapter 1) places on explicit conversations. DIT suggests that when children lack explicit discussions with adults about group differences they observe, stereotypical beliefs tend to emerge (Bigler & Liben, 2006). While parents report giving a variety of attributions about economic difference in their interviews, in their observed interactions with their children, there were many instances where they

were unclear about why someone may be struggling economically. This leads one to worry about how explicit parents might actually be with their children, and what types of attributions may develop in lieu of clear conversations.

When parents explained why they did not often discuss economic difference with their children, they often commented that the topic had not come up. Such comments are understandable. For the youngest children in our sample (aged 5-6 years), they may not yet be capable of making attributions for the economic difference or economic hardship. However, we do not know if parent socialization during this period could be beneficial in helping children develop less stereotypic ideas about the causes of wealth and poverty in the future. Further longitudinal research is needed to better understand such processes.

Additionally, research from the field of race and ethnic studies may be of some use here in understanding our results. In the last decade, a number of researchers have begun to explore what they term proactive versus reactive racial ethnic socialization (Chávez & French, 2007; Juang, et al., 2018; Priest, et al., 2016). As the names imply, reactive socialization is when parents talk about race/ethnicity following their child initiating a conversation, while proactive socialization is when parents make a point of bringing up issues of race and ethnicity without child initiation (Juang, et al., 2018). In my sample, it seems many parents erred on the side of reactive social class socialization. As I will discuss in greater detail in the final chapter of this dissertation, such socialization may be a cause for concern, as some children may not initiate conversations about social class, sensing they are taboo, although they are aware of differences and forming beliefs about why these differences exist.

Beyond the main findings we did seem some variation by groups in our data. When we look at variations by group quantitatively, the largest pattern that stands out is that attributions of all

sorts, except for non-classifiable, gradually increased with grade (Individualistic: k= 3, 2nd= 4; 4th= 5; Structural: k= 2, 2nd = 4; 4th = 4; Fatalistic: k=1, 2nd =2, 4th=3). We also saw a developmental trend in the parent-child data with causes of economic struggle other than job loss occurring in 1 kindergarten dyad compared to 5 2nd grade and 6 4th grade dyads. Descriptively however, the only place we saw differences by grade level was in the type of structural attributions that were made. These trends make sense in the literature, as we know that children are just beginning to be able to make causal attributions related to wealth and poverty in early elementary school (Leahy, 1983; Sigelman, 2012). The findings here suggest that parent socialization is matching that developmental trajectory.

In terms of political ideology, we found that liberal parents were more likely to report giving structural explanations for economic difference than were moderate/conservative parents. We also found that liberal parents were more likely to say that their child noticing someone having less they had was a spark for conversations about economic difference. These two findings suggest that parent political ideology may in fact be an important factor to consider when exploring socialization. Future research should investigate if children's beliefs and attitudes about wealth, poverty, and economic inequality vary by parent political ideology. Additionally, research could examine the impact of exposure to political discussions on children's beliefs and attitudes, as we know that related discussions can impact adolescents' beliefs about poverty (Flanagan, et al., 2014).

Finally, in terms of religious background, we found that the overwhelming majority of parents who mentioned fatalistic attributions had a religious background. Additionally, we found that religious parents made more unclassifiable attributions. As mentioned previously, while I recruited from a wide range of religious institutions, we did not collect information on parents' religiosity (i.e. how often they practice their religious) or importance of religion to them, thereby

limiting the interpretation of this finding. Future research could benefit from a more in-depth look at how religious organizations teach children about issues of economic difference and if this socialization relates to the beliefs and attitudes that children report.

Overall, this chapter has documented that parents talk about a wide variety of causes for economic difference with their children. Importantly, however, some of parents' attributions for economic hardship were unclear and parent interview data suggested that the majority of the sample reported rarely discussing economic difference with their children. As I will discuss in the final chapter, these findings point to the need for more resources for parents in terms of how to proactively socialize their children to issues of economic difference while also raising questions for future research to address.

Chapter 6:

General Discussion

Recently, the United Nations conducted an investigation of deep poverty in the US. Following his visit to the States, the head of the inquiry, Professor Phillip Alston, stated:

> I have been struck by the extent to which caricatured narratives about the purported innate differences between rich and poor have been sold to the electorate by some politicians and media, and have been allowed to define the debate. The rich are industrious, entrepreneurial, patriotic, and the drivers of economic success. The poor are wasters, losers, and scammers. As a result, money spent on welfare is money down the drain. To complete the picture we are also told that the poor who want to make it in America can easily do so: they really can achieve the American dream if only they work hard enough. (Alston, 2017)

Dr. Alston's comments highlight an important truth about American society: social class stereotypes in America drive policy debates and impact the lives of the 40 million Americans living in poverty. We know that stereotypes about rich and poor individuals have their roots in childhood (Chafel, 1997; Leahy, 1981; 1983); however we know little about the antecedents of these beliefs. In this study, I sought to examine how parents socialize their young children about issues of economic hardship and economic inequality. In this chapter, I review the major findings of my dissertation and discuss implications and possible future directions for the work.

Major Findings

Helping middle-class kids empathize and take perspective. The most prominent theme to emerge from the parent-child discussion data was the importance of empathy-related socialization practices in parent-child discussions about economic hardship. As discussed in chapter 3, in my sample empathy-related socialization took the form of labeling emotions, drawing parallels between children's lives and the lives of those experiencing economic hardship, and imagining what it would be like to experience what the families in the video experienced. These findings were supported by the parent interview data, in which a third of parents mentioned the importance of empathy development when they discussed issues of economic hardship and inequality with their child.

Overall, this is a positive finding, as research suggests increased levels of empathy and perspective taking are associated with decreased intergroup bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Developmentally, we also know this socialization approach is appropriate, as Hoffman theorizes that between 5 and 8 years old, children begin to develop the capacity to empathize with others beyond their immediate contexts, such as individuals struggling with economic hardship (Kristja´nsson, 2004). Nevertheless, we do not know the impact of such socialization practices on children's beliefs and attitudes about social class specifically. Future research should examine if empathy-related socialization practices, like the one's evident in this sample, are related to a reduction in class-based stereotypes amongst children.

Charitable Giving. When I asked parents about how they discussed helping individuals and families in need with their children, one theme became prominent: that of charity. Parents most often cited school donation drives as the sparks of conversations with their children, and they described having conversations about what charities do and how they help people meet their basic needs. At the same time, these conversations were often brief and some parents commented that in fact conversations about community organizations were infrequent and lacked depth.

Given these findings, future research with parents and in educational settings should consider how donation drives might be important contexts for conversations about issues of economic hardship, inequality, and helping. In their work with kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade students and teachers, Mistry and colleagues (2016) documented how a kindergarten class studying wealth and poverty concluded their work with a donation drive. The idea for the drive came from students and was discussed often in the class with the teacher. Such conversations could be built into curriculum in elementary school classrooms and could serve as an important moment for children to engage in more meaningful conversations about who they are helping, why they are helping, and why such conditions might exist.

While charity was clearly an important topic for parents, discussions of more structural forms of help, such as government benefits, were rarely mentioned in interviews. Strikingly, in a sample of 26 families, only 1 family who did not receive government support of some type (n=17) reported a conversation about government benefits as a way to help individuals and families in need. Additionally, the only parents who received benefits and spoke about them to their child were the two families who received them because they had foster children living at home. Therefore, it seems that the overwhelming majority of the children in our sample where not talking about government benefits as a form of support. It is important to consider where children might be learning about these benefits.

In American society, stereotypes about individuals receiving government support abound (Henry, Reyna, & Weirner, 2004). As stated at the outset of this chapter, these stereotypes about welfare drive policy in the US (Bullock, et al., 2003) and hurt the 40 million Americans living in poverty (Alston, 2017). Therefore, an important conclusion of this study is that adults, parents, and educators need to have conversations about helping those in need that include a wider variety of forms of help, including government benefits. Such conversations could help inform children's burgeoning understandings about economic hardship and hopefully shape the kinds of policies they support as they grow older.

Explaining (and not explaining) economic difference. This study is one of the first to look at how parents explain economic inequality to children. Parents reported that these conversations occur when children notice others who have more or less than they do. This makes sense, given that we know young children notice differences in possessions early on (Ramsey, 1991) and that they often focus on possessions in terms of their early ideas about wealth and poverty (Chafel, 1997; Leahy, 1981). In terms of the type of attributions (i.e. individualistic, structural, fatalistic) that parents reported giving, many parents reported multiple kinds of attributions (e.g.

structural and fatalistic) when describing a conversation about economic difference. This is positive news, since this means that children are getting different explanations for why individuals have more or less wealth. Such a variety of explanations may make children less likely to attribute wealth and poverty to stereotypic causes alone (e.g. all poor people are poor because they don't work hard; all rich people are rich because they work hard), although future studies of social class socialization should investigate this association.

Unfortunately, the most common type of attribution made in our parent-child discussion data was unclassifiable, which means it is an explanation for economic struggle for which no cause is easily identified (e.g. he lost his job). In such cases, children have to infer why a parent might have lost their job. Again, DIT would suggest that vague conversations such as these would drive children to rely on stereotypic social scripts about job loss and therefore prejudice might develop (Bigler & Liben, 2006). I think this finding highlights an area where researchers and educators can reach out to parents. If armed with the knowledge that more explicit conversations are appropriate and helpful for children, it may be that parents change their approach.

While future research will have to examine what messages have an impact on parenting practices, I believe that there are some potential recommendations we can make for parents. First, I think it is important to give parents a basic sense of when their children start to notice social class difference (preschool into early elementary) and how they notice those differences, namely in the form of possessions (e.g. having a lot of stuff, living in a small house/apartment). Second, from prior work we know that using prompts such as children's literatures or videos, as seen in this study, can be helpful for starting difficult conversations (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007; Mistry, et al., 2015). There are a number of good children's books on poverty and

economic hardship that parents can read and discuss with their children.[16] Additionally, the full Sesame Street episodes used in this dissertation are available for free on iTunes and provide young families with multiple opportunities to discuss issues of economic hardship. Finally, I think that educators who are incorporating issues of social justice into their curriculums could reach out and involve parents. Earlier I suggested that school donation drives should include developmentally appropriate lessons for children. If schools and parents coordinate their socialization efforts, we may find that socialization in both environments is improved, and that children can more deeply engage with issues of economic hardship and inequality.

Summary and group differences

While each of my chapters examine different major themes from the data, there are some common ideas and themes that resonate throughout the study. For instance, I found common differences in how parents socialized their children in terms of child grade, and their own political ideology and religious background. Moreover, there are different qualitative analysis methods that I could potentially employ in future analyses, which would look for larger socialization trends in the data.

Developmental Differences and Proactive versus Reactive Socialization. Across all three chapters, grade level differences were the most consistent and pronounced. Empathy-related discussions were increasingly nuanced with age; parent-child discussions of helping were increasingly more nuanced with age, and parents reported more definitional discussions of charities with younger children. Finally, all three major causal attributions types increased slowly with age, and parents reported a greater variety of structural attributions for economic inequality with older (4th grade)

[16] While not a comprehensive list, I would like to provide a few titles for the reader. *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams; *I See You* by Dr. Michael Genhart (this book includes a conversation guide for parents); *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña; *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan

children. In part, these findings align with the established literature on children's reasoning about wealth and poverty in early elementary school. Studies have consistently documented that younger children (i.e. 5 and 6 years old) are just beginning to understand these concepts, while children in middle childhood (i.e. 7-11 years old) have more nuanced ideas and can often reason about the causes of wealth and poverty (Chafel, 1997; Leahy, 1981; 1983).

Related to this, however, is the finding that parents seemed to wait to have certain discussions until they felt their children were older or when discussions naturally came up. This can be classified generally as a more reactive style of socialization (Chávez & French, 2007; Juang, et al., 2018; Priest, et al., 2016). At this point, we do not understand the consequences of this approach in regards to social class. Future socialization research that includes longitudinal follow-ups with children could provide some clarity, documenting if differences in socialization (i.e. proactive versus reactive conversations about wealth, poverty, and economic inequality) predict differences in children's beliefs and attitudes later.

For now, however, I worry that in an increasingly economically segregated society (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011), waiting for conversations about economic difference to occur naturally may mean these conversations never happen. In economically segregated communities, children have little contact with anyone outside their own social class, as some Maple Valley parents reported. When children only interact with peers in their own social class background, they have fewer opportunities to notice and ask about differences. They may therefore be more likely to draw on stereotypes of rich and poor individuals, which abound in the media (Streib, Ayala, & Wixted, 2017). This suggests that reactive socialization in circumstances of limited intergroup contact may limit discussions, since these conversations are likely to just "not come up" as some parents in my sample reported. As noted earlier, a lack of conversations with adults is cause for concerns in terms of developing stereotypic beliefs and attitudes (i.e. DIT; Bigler & Liben, 2006). As researchers, it seems

we should aim to reach out to parents through a greater variety of channels in order to help raise awareness about the importance of discussions about social class and about whether children in early childhood are actually aware of such differences.

Political & Religious Differences. I also examined in this study if conversations in the home environment and in our parent-child discussions varied at all in terms of the political ideology and religious background of the parents, as these categories have been shown to be important in adult beliefs about wealth and poverty (Hunt, 2002; Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011). Interestingly, I found differences connected to both political ideology and religious background in every part of this study, though often not as consistently as with grade level differences.

In terms of political ideology, I found that during parent-child discussions liberal parents were more likely to mention members of their community who were struggling economically. When interviewed about how they discussed helping individuals and families in need, liberal parents were also more likely to report structural critiques and moderate/conservative parents were less likely to discuss community organizations and government programs. Similarly, in their responses to how they discussed economic differences, liberal parents were more likely to mention structural attributions. These results paint a consistent picture that liberal and conservative parents are socializing their children differently when it comes to issues of structural support, and also community support, for families and individuals in need. Such findings suggest that future research should consider parent political ideology when examining children's beliefs and attitudes, as this is something that has not been examined in the literature to date (Mistry, et al., in preparation). It also suggests that future research may more specifically examine political socialization and the impact that it has on beliefs and attitudes about social class. For instance, in this study I had more liberal parents than conservative, in spite of recruitment efforts (see Chapter 2). I think that specifically

recruiting parents from more conservative backgrounds and understanding socialization within that context could shed better light onto how political ideology is informing social class socialization.

I also found differences according to the religious background of parents. For instance, religious parents spoke more about personal experiences of economic hardship during parent-child discussions and were more likely to promote perspective taking than non-religious parents. Non-religious parents were less likely to mention discussions of community organizations or forms of government support in relation to helping individuals and families in need. Finally, fatalistic attributions for economic difference were almost exclusively mentioned by religious parents and more religious parents mentioned non-classifiable attributions.

These findings, while interesting, are difficult to understand fully from the data in my study. Instead, I think they serve as an important area for future research. Religious background seemed to matter in how parents spoke to their children about issues of economic hardship and inequality. We know from the adult literature that religion does play a role in people's conceptions of wealth and poverty (Hooks, 2000; Hunt, 2002). In a future study, it would therefore be interesting to examine social class socialization within the religious context. For instance, in recruiting my sample one Unitarian parish had very explicit religious education for children about issues of inequality. The religious education director was very interested in learning about research in this area and how they might add to their curriculum for children. Similarly, parents in the study mentioned religious donation drives as sparks for conversations about helping individuals and families in need. Future qualitative work in religious contexts should examine the messages children receive about economic hardship and inequality, as this may teach us more about another powerful socialization agent in the lives of families and communities.

Future analyses. In addition to the group differences found across all three chapters of this study, there remains the potential to re-examine my data in a way that focuses more attention on the parents themselves. For example, there was clearly a group of parents who took a proactive approach to issues of social justice— particularly in regards to race/ethnicity and gender. It would be interesting to see if these parents had different approaches to their empathy-related socialization and the kinds of helping behaviors in which they encouraged their children to partake. Alternatively, I could also consider alternative qualitative approaches. For instance, I might take a case study approach or do an in-depth video analysis of the parent-child discussions and focus specifically on interactional styles. While these analyses would require a new round of coding, they could potentially provide interesting new insights.

Limitations

As mentioned throughout this dissertation, there are many limitations to my study. First, the sample size (n=26 dyads) is relatively small and therefore limits generalizability. The demographics of my sample also limit the generalizability of my study. Parents and children were all from a rural community that is majority white, and most came from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds, had high levels of education, and were more often liberal and religious. While recruitment efforts were made to increase the sample diversity, I learned that community connections were particularly important when recruiting vulnerable participants, such as those from low-income backgrounds, and also with groups who may be more skeptical of participating in research to begin with, such as conservatives who recent research suggests perceive hostility from the liberal majority in the academy (Honeycutt & Freberg, 2017). Future research should consider establishing connections with community organizations in order to build ties with these groups who are underrepresented in research (e.g. conservatives, families living in rural poverty). That said, the participants in my sample

do provide an important addition to the literature, helping us understand the perspective of more resourced families living in rural American communities.

In terms of measurement, my project was unable to include measures of children's beliefs and attitudes. I could therefore not examine the impact of these socialization practices on children's ideas about social class. Future research would ideally take a longitudinal approach, mapping out the relationship between socialization practices and children's emerging beliefs and attitudes across time.

Significance

In spite of these limitations, this dissertation adds to the literature in a number of significant ways. First, this study is among the first to examine parent socialization about issues of economic hardship and inequality. While there have been a few studies looking at the impact of parents in adolescence (Flanagan, et al., 2014) and how parents living in poverty discuss hardship with their children (for review see Quint, et al., 2018), no study to date has looked at the socialization practices of middle-class parents with young children. As stated throughout the manuscript, we know that children in early elementary school are starting to form their beliefs about wealth, poverty, and economic inequality (Chafel, 1997). This is therefore a critical time to examine the messages that children are encountering and internalizing.

This study also adds to the literature by using a novel methodology which captures not only parents reported socialization through interviews, but also documented conversations about economic hardship between parents and their children. To date, this is the first study that has captured discussions between parents and children, allowing us to look at the dynamic conversations that unfold and how these compare to parents reports of their conversations. For instance, in the case of causal attributions, I found that in their discussions of economic hardship, parents and children had many more non-classifiable attributions than were reported in the parent interviews.

This mismatch is important, as it suggests that future work with parents should emphasize the importance of explicit and clear conversations (Bigler & Liben, 2006).

Finally, the findings on the lack of discussion of government benefits amongst our families was particularly striking. Very little is known about how parents of any economic background discuss government benefits with their children (Quint, et al., 2018). The findings here with middle-class parents raise concerns about where and how children from more economically privileged backgrounds ever learn about the structural supports in place to help individuals and families in need. Future research, and perhaps intervention work, should consider these findings and look to see if similar patterns emerge with parents and children from different backgrounds.

Overall, I hope these results begin to shed light on how children are taught about economic hardship and inequality in childhood. We know that this is an important time for children as their ideas and beliefs about social class are just forming (Chafel, 1997). The more we know about how children learn about these issues, the better we as educators and researchers can engage with children and help disrupt the development of stereotypic reasoning. Additionally, I hope this research serves to help inform future literature for parents on different strategies they might employ when talking about economic hardship and inequality with their children. At the end of one interview, a mother told me she was upset because she realized that she did not know how to talk about "this stuff" with her children. She is not alone. These conversations can be challenging, but we know they are important. It is imperative, therefore, that as researchers we not only strive to understand social class socialization, but that we disseminate our research in ways that can used by families, in order to help them to mitigate stereotype development at home.

Tables & Figures

Table 1. Demographic Information

Children	Grade		Frequency
		Kindergarten	9
		2nd	9
		4th	8
	Gender		
		Female	9
		Male	17
	Race/Ethnicity		
		European American	22
		Asian American	1
		Bi/ Multi Racial	1
		Other	2
Respondent Parents	Gender		
		Female	24
		Male	2
	Annual Family Income		
		$25,000-$49,999	2
		$50,000- $74,999	2
		$75,000- $99,999	10
		$100,000- $199,999	8
		$200,000+	4
	Parent Education		
		Some College	1
		Bachelors	8
		Graduate Degree	17
	Race/ Ethnicity		
		European American	23
		Asian American	1

		Other	2
	Religious Background		
		Protestant	8
		No Religious Background	7
		Non-Christian Other	5
		Non-Protestant Christian	5
		Missing	1
	Political Ideology		
		Liberal	17
		Moderate/Conservative	9

Table 2. Participant Pseudonyms

Grade	Child	Parent	Income	Political Ideology	Religious Affiliation
Kindergarten	Lucy	Amanda	$150,000-$199,999	Liberal	None
	Naomie	Rose	$75,000-$99,999	Liberal	Agnostic
	May	Frannie	$50,000-$74,999	Very Liberal	None
	Frank	Erica & Colin	$75,000-$99,999	Moderate	Catholic
	Liam	Felisha	$100,000-$149,999	Moderate	Orthodox Christian
	Milo	Jessica	$100,000-$149,999	Liberal	Humanist
	Wesley	Nev	$200,000-$349,999	Liberal	Atheist
	Felix	Johanna	$75,000-$99,999	Very Liberal	Catholic & Agnostic
	Noah	Amber	$75,000-$99,999	Moderate	Quaker
2nd Grade	Jenna	Breanne	$50,000-$74,999	Very Liberal	Lutheran
	Emmy	Fiona	$25,000-$34,999	Liberal	Unitarian Universalist
	Aimee	Caty	$100,000-$149,999	Liberal	Agnostic
	Benjamin	Megan	$75,000-$99,999	Moderate	Congregationalist
	Philip	Sean	$200,000-$349,999	Very Liberal	Congregationalist
	Ephraim	Xenia	$200,000-$349,999	Very Liberal	Jewish
	Walker	Lacey	$100,000-$149,999	Conservative	Christian
	Jude	Hildi	$75,000-$99,999	Liberal	Missing
	Max	Angela	$350,000+	Liberal	Protestant
4th Grade	Molly	Esther	$75,000-$99,999	Moderate	Non-denominational Protestant
	Alexandra	Rachel	$75,000-$99,999	Moderate	Orthodox Christian
	Ruby	Emily	$75,000-$99,999	Very Liberal	Unitarian Universalist

	Leo	Stacey	$100,000-$149,999	Liberal	Spiritual
	James	Tyler	$25,000-$34,999	Conservative	None
	Sam	Nicole	$100,000-$149,999	Moderate	Christian UCC
	Teddy	Hilary	$75,000-$99,999	Liberal	Agnostic
	Dan	April	$100,000-$149,999	Liberal	Protestant

Table 3. Video Clip Descriptions

Family Name & Sesame Street Special	Length (min)	Setting & Demographics	Plot Summary
The Valentin Family from *Families Stand Together*	07:10	• Suburban setting • Mother, father, and 6 children • Racially/ ethnically ambiguous	The clip begins with the family's father explaining that he lost his 16-year job just after the mother decided to stay home with their children. The parents discuss how hard the job loss was, especially not being able to give the children what they ask for. The parents review their budget together and discuss how they worry about losing their home. The family decided to have a garage sale to earn more money. The children participate by selling lemonade and t-shirts- the father discusses how the six-year-old boy worries a lot about the family's situation. The clip concludes with the family discussing how grateful they are for getting to spend together and how much unconditional love they have for each other.
Balley Family from *Families Stand Together*	06:55	• Suburban setting • Mother, father, and 2 children • European American (Italian & Irish)	The clip begins with the parents explaining that the family must short-sell their home because the father lost his job. The parents discuss how the children handled the news of having to move and how hard it was for them. They then discuss moving into a smaller rental home and how having a garden saves the family money on food. The

			children discuss how they save money by doing chores. The clip ends with the parents reflecting on how they have made the new rental house a home and how close they are as a family.
Josie & her Family from *Hope Against Hunger*	08:57	• Rural Setting • Single father and 3 children • European American father & Multi-racial children	The clip opens with Josie (age 7) telling her father she is hungry. Father explains that he lost his job and that the children's mother requested he care for the children. The family had to move in with the children's aunt because they could not afford housing. The father and daughter discuss not having money for food and going hungry. They then discuss how they got help from the community foodbank and community garden and the emotions (positive and negative) that went with that. The clip ends with the family helping others through the food pantry, getting their own apartment, and the father finding work.
Jafir & his Family from *Hope Against Hunger*	07:50	• Urban Setting • Mother, father, and 4 children • African American	The clip opens with footage of a run-down urban neighborhood (e.g. closed stores). Next, there is a scene of Jafir (age 11) playing with his mom and younger siblings. Jafir and his mother talk about their family and his mother discusses wanting to move out of their neighborhood. The family struggles to pay their bills, despite the father working as a barber. The mother is then shown

			applying for WIC and SNAP benefits. The mother then discusses starting school at the food bank to train to be a chef- her lifelong dream. The clip then follows the mom through school and a job interview to be a chef at a childcare facility. The clip concludes with the mother graduating and getting the job.

Table 4. Parent-Child Codes

Category	Code	Definition	Number of Interviews in which represented
Empathy Building			
	Emotions	e.g. s/he looks sad/happy and Personal emotions – e.g. "That's super sad, isn't it?" How does that make you feel? Was that a sad video?, Smiles	25
	In their shoes	Imagine if this happened to us, "What would you do if you were the dad?"	20
	Personal Connections-Not Related to Poverty	personal connections excluding poverty, e.g. they have bunk beds just like you	26
Equity & Fairness		e.g. we all deserve education/food/enough money	3
General Issues of Poverty & Economic Hardship			
	Definitions	related to economic hardship and poverty; includes parents clarifying if their children understand a concept (e.g. Do you know what a foodbank is?)	18
	Government Support	e.g. WIC, Food Stamps	7
	Monetary Issues	cost of items, amount of money people have (exclude just references to the word money e.g. "to earn more money for the family")	22
	What people need	e.g. people need food, housing	14
	Why it's hard to be poor	hunger, "they couldn't get enough nutrition", neighborhood safety, losing house, giving up	25

		things, Educational inequity, It was just bad that they had to sell things ...	
	Getting out of/ Avoiding Poverty and Economic Hardship	Education, Saving/ Budgeting, Job	18
Causes of Poverty			
	Job Loss	e.g. discussion of family struggling because parent lost job	22
	Other than Job Loss	includes factors such as low wages, personal effort, structural inequities	12
Personal Experiences with Poverty or Economic Hardship			
	Children or families in your school or community	e.g. kids in your school getting financial assistance with camp, community members getting meals at the Mission	12
	Parent/Child /Relative	e.g. discussion of grandparents' poverty; parents receiving WIC when child was a baby	7
Looking at the positives		e.g. family happy in spite of poverty; good things can come out of hard situations	23
Helping			
	Community Organizations	e.g.- local community charities such as The Mission and The Cooperative; includes references to individuals donating to community to organizations	16
	General reference to helping	e.g. talking about the family helping others, talking about the importance of helping, community support	21
	What could we do?	e.g. parent or child thinking about what they as individuals or families do or can do to help.	9

Table 5. Parent Interview Helping Themes

Category	Code	Definition	Number of Interviews in which represented
Conversational Sparks			
	School	School can drives, after school activities, free and reduced priced lunch	15
	Religious	Church collections, religious education classes	7
	Neighborhood/ Community	Community fundraisers (e.g. 19 days of Cheshire), community wealth, seeing homeless people on the street, shopping at the Collective (local charity thrift store)	11
	Direct Donation	Donations directly to charities (e.g. the Mission and the Collective) that do not go through school/ religious institutions/ etc.	12
	Volunteer Activities	Parents or children volunteering for charities	5
	Lack of Spark	Lack of spark resulting in lack of discussion e.g. lack of homeless people on the street therefore do not talk; "But we're not a part of a church or anything and my husband's not religious so it's hard to give that "; child always has food so doesn't think about food insecurity	6
	Other Spark	Adoption and foster care, birthday parties, Boy Scouts, immigration, the Women's March	16
Content of Conversation			

	Basic Needs	Food, shelter, heating (e.g. kids receiving school breakfast — parents can't buy breakfast; WIC for milk)	21
	Community Organizations	Explaining what the Mission and the Collective are and who they serve	22
	Save/Spend/Charity	Model of budgeting where children's money is divided into money to save, money to spend, and money to give to others/ charity	5
Values & Lessons			
	Helping & Civic Responsibility	Community helping and participation; helping in little ways (e.g. "if you can do a little something, you should"); importance of helping others	19
	Appreciation	Appreciation of what child has (e.g. "so that she understands that where we live here is pretty great, and we have it pretty great")	6
	Structural Critique	Structural causes of inequality such as racism, sexism, immigration status	5
	Kindness/ Caring	Importance of being kind	6
	Empathy/ Perspective Taking	Explicit references to the importance of empathy; encouraging perspective taking (e.g. "You have fun playing with these, and wouldn't it be nice if another child could have fun playing with these?")	9
	Other Value/ Lesson	Treating people the same regardless of class; let's not judge; don't be a burden to others; hard work	11
What informs conversations			
	Shame & Embarrassment	Embarrassment over receiving benefits	2

	Avoiding child worry	Do not want child to worry about their own or other's well-being	2
	Avoiding child guilt	Do not want child to feel guilty for what they have	1
	Child's level of understanding	What child can and cannot understand due to age, cognitive ability, experience	11
	Parent's prior experiences	e.g. Parent's prior experiences of economic struggle	3
Has or does family receive benefits?			
	No	Family does/ has not received benefits	17
	Yes- Doesn't discuss	Family does/ has received benefits and does not discuss	5
	Yes- Discusses	Family does/ has received benefits and does discuss	2
Aspirational/ Hypothetical		What parent plans to discuss in the future or what they would discuss if a particular situation occurred	7
Quantity of discussions			
	Discusses A lot	What parents report discussing a lot	4
	Doesn't discuss/ rarely	What parents report discussing rarely or never	17

Table 6. Parent Interview Causes of Economic Differences Themes

Category	Code	Definition	Number of Interviews in which represented
Conversational Sparks			
	Comparison to Others: Others having less or having it worse	When a child notices someone who has less than them (e.g. fewer possessions) or someone who is having a difficult time (e.g. foster child)	11
	Comparison to Others: Others having more or having it better	When a child notices someone who has more than them (e.g. a peer with a new gaming system) or someone who's lifestyle seems better (e.g. goes on nice vacations).	8
	Community Wealth	References to the wealth of a community (e.g. Greenley is a rich community)	4
	Child wants something	When the child requests something (e.g. a toy, ice cream)	3
	Charitable Giving/ Volunteering	When a conversation is sparked by the parent or child's experience of charitable giving or volunteering	2
	Other Spark	parent job, chores and allowance, having a bigger family, when parent or child asks a question, overhearing parent conversations ed (e.g. talking about cost of higher ed.)	7
Causes of Economic Difference			
	Individualistic	hard work, not spending wisely (e.g. wasting money on car), how you choose to spend money	12

	Structural	different jobs pay different amounts of money, it's not necessarily how hard you work, people work hard but can't make ends meet; lack of opportunity; technology taking away jobs	10
	Fatalistic	luck, getting sick, "I'd just say like there's always gonna be somebody who has more and there's gonna be somebody who has less,"	6
	Not Classifiable	This is a vague attribution for economic difference (e.g. they lost their job)	7
Values & Lessons			
	Treating people the same	Parent emphasizes that no matter what all people should be treated the same	3
	Helping & Civic Responsibility	Parent emphasizes the importance of helping others and/ or the child's responsibility to the community	2
	Kindness	Parent emphasizes being kind	1
	Empathy/ Perspective Taking	"remember how it feels when they're not kind back, and you don't want to ever make someone else feel that way", not wanting to judge others; "So I try to teach her that yeah, we don't have enough money to go to Disney World. But there are families who don't have enough money to eat. And so to understand that the bigger picture."	1
	Other Value/ Lesson	"we just don't want them going to school and saying, "Oh, so-and-so's family doesn't have a house." not letting money inform all of your decisions (e.g. not having to go to college), hard work; class blind; Importance of Community; Not	12

		always getting what you want; Fairness & Equity; "You can't just rely on having a college education", appreciation	
What informs conversations			
	Parent's prior experiences	Parental socialization is informed by what the parent experienced before (e.g. having struggled economically earlier)	9
	Child's level of understanding	What child can and cannot understand due to age, cognitive ability, experience	7
	Avoiding child worry/ assuring stability	Parent strives to avoid topics that would worry child	2
	Lack of Conversational spark	The topic doesn't come up because of a lack of a spark (e.g. no homeless people on the streets)	1
	Other	e.g. never thought of discussing it	5
Quantity of discussions			
	Discusses A lot	What parents report discussing a lot	4
	Doesn't discuss/ rarely	What parents report discussing rarely or never	16
Aspirational/ Hypothetical		What parents would like to talk about/ plan to talk about in the future (e.g. parents talk with older child and plan to with younger) OR what the parent would do in another hypothetical circumstance	11
Education		Parent referenced education in any way	12

Appendix A

Table 7. Recruitment Efforts

Response	Group/Organization	Notes
Yes (recruited from)		
	Summerset Congregational Church	Pastor to emailed families and followed up in person
	Community Lutheran Church - Brighton	Pastor spoke to family
	Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Maple Valley	Spoke in person
	Greenley Friends Meeting (Quaker)	Email sent to group
	Maple Valley Zen Center	Email sent to group
	The Burnley Recreation Center	Recruited parents in person at basketball practice
	The Charleston Recreation Center	Recruited parents in person at basketball practice
	The Lilian Faye School	Parents sent recruitment materials by email and from teachers
	The Maple Valley Humanist Group	Email sent to group
	St. Peter and St. Paul's Orthodox Church	Email sent to group
	The Maple Valley Listservs	Email sent to all town listservs in Maple Valley
	Parkside Elementary	Facebook post to parent group
	The Wellsworth College Childcare Center	Email sent to parents
	The Wellsworth College Chaplin's Office	Emailed to all parishes on their list and presented at their monthly meeting
	The Lockland County Republicans	Reached out to families
	The Open Door Church-Lemmingsworth	Email sent to group
	Burnley Drop-In Center	Flyers given to all 4th graders
	Burnley Public Library	Flyer hung up
	Fairley Public Library	Flyer hung up
	Maple Valley Meditation Society	Distributed to family group
	Granville Public Library	Flyer hung up
	Lemmingsworth Elementary School	Principal handed out flyers to PTO and Guidance Counselor distributed flyers to families.
	Maple Valley Community College-Children's Literature Course	Spoke to class
	Wellsworth Jewish Community Center	Flyer given out
	Emoryville WIC Office	WIC staff gave out flyers to families who had older children

	St. Thomas Episcopal Church - Charleston	Pastor sent flyer to two families with children in age range
	Waynesville ListServ	Email sent to listserv
	The Collective	Emails sent and flyers hung
	Maple Valley Resource Fair	I did direct recruitment, speaking with families attending the fair put on by a local non-profit
	Maple Valley Housing Association	I met with directors and they posted and distributed flyers to clients
Reached out to but Did not Hear back		
	Burnley United Methodist Church	Never Heard From
	First Congregational Church - Burnley	Never Heard From
	St. Catherine's Episcopal Church - Emoryville	Never Heard From
	Holy Virgin Mary Episcopal Church	Never Heard From
	Saybrook Congregational Church	Never Heard From
	Meditation Center of Emoryville	Never Heard From
	First Congregational Church - Clinton	Never Heard From
	Maple Valley Jewish Center	Never Heard From
	The Maple Valley Democrats	Never Heard From
	The Livingston School	Never Heard From
	The Saybrook Elementary School	Never Heard From
	Maple Valley Homeschoolers	Never Heard From
	The Maple Valley Boy Scouts	Never Heard From
	The Johnsonville Elementary School	Never Heard From
	The Maple Valley Workers Party	Said yes- then I never heard back
	Eagle Academy	Secretary passed along but did not hear back
	The Housing Authority	Reached out
	Maple Valley Interfaith Group	Reached out
No		
	The Mission	The staff reported there were no families in the target age range
	The Hayden School	PTA said I could not recruit
	The Greenley Recreation center	The director said the study was not appropriate
	Maple Valley Families United	No Families in age range
	United Church of Clinton	No Families in age range
	Davis Village School	Rejected by SAU
	Emoryville Head Start	Said no but recommended other locations to reach out to
	The Maple Valley Girl Scouts	A staffer reached out to scout leaders but no interested
Maybe		

	Brighton Elementary School	Emailed with superintendent but then heard nothing
	The Tobias School	Said yes but then could not find time
	The Emoryville School	Said yes but then could not find time
	Granville Elementary School	Parent reached out to contact school on my behalf

Document 1. Recruitment Flyer to be Emailed or Distributed by Hand

UCLA Study

Hello,

My name is Kate Griffin and I am a doctoral candidate at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies and I am currently recruiting families for a research project in the [redacted]. In this project, we are interested in learning about how parents talk to their kindergarten, 2nd, and 4th grade children about different social issues such as hunger, poverty, and helping others. Parents play a huge role in their children's lives, so parent participation is essential to this study.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a discussion based activity with your child. After watching a video clip on a social issue, you will be asked to discuss the video with your child. This discussion will be audio and video recorded. Additionally, following the discussion, you will be interviewed regarding your ideas about speaking to your child about social issues. More details about the study are on the attached consent form.

All parents who participate will receive a $20 Amazon Gift Card and all children who participate will receive a book. Additionally, you will be reimbursed for your millage at a rate of 53.5 ¢ per mile and any parking fees.

Please contact me if you would like to participate or with any questions or concerns you might have. I would love to speak with you more about the study. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Best,

Kate

(phone) 323-806-4720

(email) katherinemg@ucla.edu

Document 2. Recruitment Flyer to be Hung Up.

UCLA Study

Hello,

My name is Kate Griffin and I am a doctoral candidate at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies and I am currently recruiting families for a research project in the [redacted]. In this project, we are interested in learning about how parents talk to their kindergarten, 2nd, and 4th grade children about different social issues such as hunger, poverty, and helping others. Parents play a huge role in their children's lives, so parent participation is essential to this study.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a discussion based activity with your child. After watching a video clip on a social issue, you will be asked to discuss the video with your child. This discussion will be audio and video recorded. Additionally, following the discussion, you will be interviewed regarding your ideas about speaking to your child about social issues. More details about the study are on the attached consent form.

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Appendix B

Document 3. **Protocol for Parent-Child Discussion Session**

Researcher: *Thank you both for agreeing to participate in the project today. I am going to start by turning on this video camera and this audio recorder so I can remember what we discussed today. Additionally, I'm going to take a few notes on this sheet of paper.*

We are now going to view two video clips from a television special. Each clip is about 10 minutes long, but please feel free to talk to each other during the clip or even pause the clip to talk, just as you might if you were at home watching this on your personal computer or television. After each clip I would like you to discuss amongst yourselves what you watched, again just as you might if you were watching it at home. Once you are finished, let me know and I will start the second video clip and we will repeat just like the first one. Do you have any questions? (pause) *Okay, let's get started.*

CLIP NUMBER I: _____

(space left for notetaking)

After first video clip:

Researcher: *Okay. So now I would like you to discuss the clip you just saw. You can talk about what happened to the family, ask each other questions, or anything else that comes to mind.*

(space left for note taking)

After discussion:

Researcher: *Okay, are you all done? Now we will watch a clip about a second child and his/her family.*

CLIP II: _____

(space left for notetaking)

After second video clip:

Researcher: *Okay. So now I would like you to discuss the clip you just saw. You can talk about what happened to the family, ask each other questions, or anything else that comes to mind.*

Researcher: *Thank you both for your participation! [Child's Name], now we are going to have you go play with [RA's Name] in the other room while I interview your mom/dad. We will be out in just a few minutes.*

Document 4. **Protocol for Parent Interview**

Note: Child is escorted out of the room by undergraduate RA (who they met prior to the activity) and will be allowed to play and read under RA supervision throughout the parent interview.

Researcher: *I would like to ask you a few questions about the conversations you may have with your child about money and finances, what it means to be successful, and about giving and receiving help. If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions it is okay not to answer them and if you would like to end the interview we can stop at any time. With your permission, I will be audio recording our conversation just so that I don't have to write everything down. Do you have any questions?* (pause) *Are you okay with us talking today*? (record consent; answer any questions or concerns parent may have) (if consent provided:) *Are you okay with my audio recording our conversation today*?

Consent: □ Yes □ No (thank parent for their participation and conclude the interview)

I would like to start by talking about conversations you have with your son/daughter about family finances.

- *In the past week can you tell me about any conversations with your son/daughter about money?*
    - *(If they don't say anything to this could ask specifically about: such as family finances, spending (how much things cost), things about work or jobs)*
    - *What did you talk about?*

Follow-up prompts if not already addressed:

- *Who initiated the conversation?*
- *Did your child have any questions? What did he/she want to know?*
- *How typical was this of the types of conversations you general have with your child about money?*
- *In general, how comfortable would you say you are when talking about money with your child? Are there any topics you would not be comfortable discussing with your child? When do you think you would discuss that with him/her?*

- *What do you think is important for your child to know at his/her age about money and family finances?*

- *In the past week have you had any conversation with your partner or other adults in your home about money?*
    - *What do you talk about?*
    - *Parents sometimes tell us that they try to avoid having conversations about money and finances in front of their children. What about you?*

- *Many communities have programs and agencies that help families in need. Do you ever have conversations with your son/daughter about such programs in your community?*
        - Clarification: *For example, these could be non-profits, other charities such as food banks, shelters, or religious organizations, or public programs such as WIC, SNAP, CHIP.*
    - *What do you generally talk about?*
    - *Has your family ever (or does your family) applied for or used any programs and services? If so, which ones and did you discuss this with your child?*
        - Follow up: *Can you tell me a little more…*

Beyond finances pertaining to your own family, I am also interested in the kinds of conversations that you have with your son/daughter about money and financial issues more generally.

- *Can you tell me about a time when you've spoken with your daughter/son about why families have different amounts of money?*
    - *What do you talk about?*
    - *What do you think is important for your child to know at his/her age about why families have different amounts of money?*
    - *In general, how comfortable would you say you are when talking about why families have different amounts of money with your child?*
        - *Are there any topics you would not be comfortable discussing with your child? When do you think you would discuss that with him/her?*

- *Can you tell me about a time when you've talked with your daughter/son about what it takes to be successful in America?*
    - *What do you talk about?*
    - *What do you think is important for your child to know at his/her age about what it takes to be successful in America?*

- *People have a lot of different ideas about how to help individuals and families in need in our society. Can you tell me about a time when you've talked with your son or daughter about how to help individuals and families in need?*
    - *What do you talk about?*
    - *What do you think is important for your child to know at his/her age about what can be done to help individuals and families in need in our society?*

Researcher: *Thank you so much for your answers to those questions. Before you go, I would like to have you fill out this final survey so I know a little bit more about your family background. Would you like me to read you the survey or would you prefer to fill it out on your own?*

NOTE: Researcher stays in room in case parent has questions.

Researcher: *Thank you so much! Do you have any questions or concerns about what we discussed today?* [Pause]

Here is a $20 Amazon Gift Card. Please remember to take your consent form which has my contact information as well as my advisor's and the UCLA IRB's if you have any questions or concerns later on. Let's go have [CHILD NAME] choose a book that he/she would like to take home.

Document 5. **Demographics Questionnaire**

Participant ID _____

Today's Date _____

We would like to know a little more about the families participating in this study. Please answer the following questions about yourself and your family.

Child Information: This is the information for the child participating in the study.

1. Date of Birth: _____

2. Gender:
   □ Female □ Male □ Other

3. Racial/ Ethnic Identification (please specify national or ethnic heritage as well- e.g. √ European American: Polish & Irish):

   □ Latino/a _____

   □ African American _____

   □ European American _____

   □ Asian American _____

   □ Bi/ Multi Racial or Mixed Race or Ethnicity _____

   □ Other _____

4. Grade in School: _____

5. Number of Siblings & Their Ages: _____

Parent Information: Please fill this out for yourself.

6. Relationship to Child: _____

7. Where does child live?

□ With me □ With another parent or caregiver

□ Other (please specify) _____

8. Age: _____

9. Gender:

□ Female □ Male □ Other (please specify) _____

10. Racial/ Ethnic Identification (please specify national or ethnic heritage as well- e.g. √ European American: Polish & Irish):

□ Latino/a _____

□ African American _____

□ European American _____

□ Asian American _____

□ Bi/ Multi Racial or Mixed Race or Ethnicity _____

□ Other _____

11. Relationship Status:

□ Single □ Married □ Cohabitating □ Other (please specify) _____

12. Highest Educational Level Attained

□ Elementary/ Middle School □ Some High School □ High School

□ Some College □ Associates Degree □ Bachelor's Degree

□ Graduate Degree (e.g. M.A., J.D., PhD)

13. Household Annual Income:

□ Under $10,000 □ $10,000-$14,999 □ $15,000- $24,999

□ $25,000- $34,999 □ $35,000- $49,999 □ $50,000- $74,999

□ $75,000- $99,999 □ $100,000- $149,999 □ $150,000- $199,999

□ $200,000- $349,999 □ $350,000 or more

14. Circle which of the following best describes your family's current social class?

Poor Working Class Lower Middle Class Middle Class Upper Middle Class Upper class

Has your family always been this way? Yes No

If No, which of the following best describes your family's former social class(es)?

Poor Working Class Lower Middle Class Middle Class Upper Middle Class Upper class

How has it changed?

_____

_____

15. What is your religious ideology?

Protestant (please specify your denomination): _____

Muslim Hindu Catholic Atheist Buddhist Jewish

Unitarian Universalist Sikh Orthodox Christian Agnostic

Other (please specify): _____

16. Would you say that your current neighborhood is…?

Mostly poor Mostly Working Class Mostly Middle Class Mostly rich

A Mix of Different Groups (name)_____
Other_____

17. Which best describes your political views?

VERY LIBERAL LIBERAL MODERATE CONSERVATIVE VERY CONSERVATIVE

18. Which best describes your political ideology?

DEMOCRAT REPUBLICAN LIBERTARIAN INDEPENDENT

OTHER: _____

Other Caregiver Information: Please fill this out for your child's other caregiver (e.g. parent, step-parent, etc.) if applicable.

□ Check if Not Applicable

19. Relationship to Child: _____

20. Does child live with this caregiver?
    □ Yes □ No (please specify) _____

21. Age: _____

22. Gender:

    □ Female □ Male □ Other (please specify) _____

23. Racial/ Ethnic Identification (please specify national or ethnic heritage as well- e.g. √ European American: Polish & Irish):

    □ Latino/a _____

    □ African American _____

    □ European American _____

    □ Asian American _____

    □ Bi/ Multi Racial or Mixed Race or Ethnicity _____

    □ Other _____

24. Relationship Status:

□ Single □ Married □ Cohabitating □ Other (please specify) _____

25. Highest Educational Level Attained:

□ Elementary/ Middle School □ Some High School □ High School

□ Some College □ Associates Degree □ Bachelor's Degree

□ Graduate Degree (e.g. M.A., J.D., PhD)

26. Household Annual Income (only if different than your own):

□ Same as my household annual income

□ Under $10,000 □ $10,000-$14,999 □ $15,000- $24,999

□ $25,000- $34,999 □ $35,000- $49,999 □ $50,000- $74,999

□ $75,000- $99,999 □ $100,000- $149,999 □ $150,000- $199,999

□ $200,000- $349,999 □ $350,000 or more

27. What is their religious ideology?

Protestant (please specify your denomination): _____

Muslim Hindu Catholic Atheist Buddhist Jewish

Unitarian Universalist Sikh Orthodox Christian Agnostic

Other (please specify): _____

28. Which best describes their political views?

VERY LIBERAL LIBERAL MODERATE CONSERVATIVE VERY CONSERVATIVE

29. Which best describes their political ideology?

DEMOCRAT REPUBLICAN LIBERTARIAN INDEPENDENT

OTHER: _____

30. The United States is a nation of people from different ancestries. Some have moved to the U.S. in recent generations, others have been here a long time. How about your family?

Check the statement(s) that describe your family.

_____ My child was born outside the United States.

Where was he/she born? _____

How old he/she when you moved to the U. S.?_____

_____ I was born outside the United States .

Where were you born? _____

How old were you when you moved to the U. S.?_____

_____ My husband/wife/partner was born outside the United States .

Where was he/she born? _____

How old was he/she when they moved to the U. S.?_____

_____ One or both of my parents moved to the U. S. I was born in the U.S.

_____ One or both of my wife/husband/partner's parents moved to the U. S. My wife/husband/partner was born here.

_____ My family has lived in the U. S for several generations.

_____ I don't know.

Thank you very much! We appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions.

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